

Delivered by Jesus

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[0 : 0 0] One night in April 2014, hundreds of fighters with the jihadist group Boko Haram descended on the town of Chibok in northeastern Nigeria. They stormed the boarding school full of teenage girls and abducted 276 of them. Some of these girls have been released. They were traded for Boko Haram soldiers by the Nigerian government. But after over five years, apparently 112 girls, now young women, are still missing. And it's a tragedy that they are still in captivity after all these years. Now I'm sure you and I can scarcely imagine anything worse than being enslaved, than being held in captivity against our will. And yet that's what we find here in Mark chapter 5, because we're introduced to a man who is enslaved to the demons who possess him. But the good news is that this man is delivered by Jesus Christ. And so what we've got here is a vivid account. And it's part of a series of incidents where we see the power and the authority of Jesus Christ. So earlier, last week if you were here, we saw how Jesus calmed a storm outside of the sea. And here we see Jesus calmed a storm inside of a man. But in case we think this has got no relevance to us, what we need to see is the reality that we're all enslaved. And we all need to be delivered by Jesus. And so today we're going to look at three points as we study this passage together. First of all, the power that enslaves, the greater power that delivers in verse 11 to 16. And then thirdly, how to respond to that power, verse 17 to 20. So the power that enslaves, the greater power that delivers, and then how to respond to that power. So first of all, the power that enslaves in verse 1 to 10. Just read with me again verse 1 to 5. They went across the lake to the region of the Gerasenes. When Jesus got out of the boat, a man with an impure spirit came from the tombs to meet him. This man lived in the tombs, and no one could bite him anymore, not even with a chain. For he had 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. Night and day among the tombs and in the hills he would cry out and cut himself with stones.

Okay, so the pigs here in this story indicate that when Jesus got out of the boat, he was stepping into Gentile territory because Jews didn't farm pigs. They regarded pigs as being unclean. Now later on, if you look down in verse 20 to the Decapolis, which literally means 10 cities was a Gentile region. And that's where we meet this demon-possessed man. And his desperate condition here is vividly described in verse 1 to 5. He was a madman living in the tombs, and nobody could control him out of his madness because he was so strong. And yet he was tormented by an impure spirit, meaning that he was captive to the power of Satan.

And so this man spent his life in anguish and despair, crying out and cutting himself with stones. And so in this wretched and pitiable state, he was more like a ferocious animal than he was like a human being. In fact, the word for subdue in verse 4 is one that's normally used for the taming of a wild beast. So that describes this man. And yet we see what happens when Jesus arrives on the scene. Verse 6 and 7. When he saw Jesus from a distance, he ran and fell on his knees in front of him. 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.

So this man, who could be subdued by anyone, falls down on his knees in submission to Jesus Christ. And he calls Jesus, Son of the Most High God. And so he recognises who Jesus is, but he says, In God's name, don't torture me. So here the demons are trying to control Jesus. But this isn't a contest between two equal but opposite forces that are the same. Because when demons encounter the divine in Jesus Christ, there's only going to be one winner. Jesus just needs to say the word and the demons are gone. That's what we see in verse 8 to 10. For Jesus had said to him, Come out of this man, you impure spirits. Then Jesus asked him, What is your name? My name is Legion, he replied, for we are many. And he begged Jesus again and again not to send him out of the area. So it's clear that Jesus has got power and authority over demons. And this man is infested with demons. Because when Jesus asks his name, he says,

My name is Legion, for we are many. So his name graphically describes his condition. Because Legion describes a military unit of about 6,000 soldiers. So this man is saying that his body is like a battleground for demonic activity. He's completely outnumbered and he's completely overpowered by the demons within. It's like a horror movie, isn't it? Except that it's real.

[5 : 54] Now I guess some people today might dismiss all talk of demon possession as being just superstitious nonsense. Surely, we might say, nobody believes in demons these days, do they? Isn't this kind of story from a time when people didn't understand psychology or medicine or mental illness? Weren't these ancient people simply just simplistic and naive in how they understood the complexity of the human personality? You see, it can be all too easy to downplay the work of Satan and the work of demons in the 21st century world. Yeah.

Amen. Okay. See you again. Thanks for coming. Okay. So, back to demons. People dismiss the work of demons in our 21st century Western world, thinking that this power is just too incomprehensible.

It's from an earlier era when people didn't really understand what was going on. But, of course, we shouldn't dismiss things as being demonic too quickly. Something strange doesn't necessarily mean it's demonic, but neither should we dismiss demons as being somehow a chemical imbalance in the brain. So, we should never underestimate the power of Satan or demons or the complexity of evil. I guess, if anything, our culture tries to turn this supernatural, satanic, demonic element in life into entertainment. And a good example of this is the BBC's recent adaptation of Dracula. It was on TV over the new year as a makeover of Bram Stoker's 1897 novel.

I didn't see Dracula. I did see the trailer, which freaked me out enough as I was waiting for the football to come on. But I did read a fascinating review by Melanie Phillips in the Times newspaper.

And her article was entitled, Dracula Reflects the Power of Christianity. And in her article, she highlights the disconnections between the new treatment of Dracula, the TV series, with the original book.

[8 : 23] But she does say that there's one aspect of Dracula that strikingly stays connected to Bram Stoker's original. And it's this idea that Christianity wards off the devil in an endless battle between good and evil.

And so she says, not only does Dracula fear the crucifix, but Christianity is shown as providing the antidote of light to his darkness.

And she gets it right, doesn't she? Because the devil and his minions are real and they're powerful, however much our culture might try and dismiss them.

And ultimately, what we want is for the greater power of good to overcome the power of evil in our own lives, but especially out there in our world.

And yet that can only happen through Jesus Christ. He is the only hope that good will ultimately lead and destroy evil. And we see this happening in religion's story.

[9 : 25] And yet the promise of Christianity is that eventually, for everything, good will overcome evil. The evil powers will be overcome by Jesus Christ.

And yet what we see here is that happening in a life. And so this can happen for you and for me. And so there's an application here for us all. Because although different in style, our human condition is just as hopeless as legions.

So we are enslaved and we are captive to sin. We're hostages to Satan and we are awaiting judgment. And so Satan's aim, Satan the devil, is, since he's destined for destruction himself, is to take as many people with him as possible.

And so, of course, our predicament seems less obvious. We may not be possessed by an impure spirit, but we know that we have got impure hearts. And so legion vividly illustrates the hopeless plight of every single human being who's ever lived.

And why we all need to be delivered from our enslavement by Jesus Christ. So that's enslavement on the grand scale. And yet, for anyone who's been set free by Jesus, and we call themselves a Christian, we still need to be aware of the enslaving power of sin in our lives.

[10 : 54] Because while we're set free from the penalty of sin, when we trust in Jesus Christ, Jesus paid the price for that penalty of the cross, we're still not free from the presence of sin.

And that's why particular sins can enslave us. For example, it might be the sin of greed or materialism, where we think we are in control of our money, but it's our money that's got control over us.

Or it might be the addictive power of sexual sin, from pornography right through to sexual immorality, where we think we are in control, but it's our desires that are controlling us.

Or it might be the ruthless quest for power and for status, where we think we are in control of our career, and yet, in reality, our job is in control of us, because we are a slave to our work.

Our work takes over our lives, and it becomes, if you like, our object of worship. So you can see how we can be enslaved to sin in our lives. So, we might seem like a legion on the outside, strong, powerful, and yet, on the inside, simultaneously, we can be enslaved and trapped and unable to change.

[12 : 20] It's a bit like, to use an illustration, it's a bit like a prisoner who's been set free from a cell. That's what Jesus Christ does. We are locked up in a cell, trapped, awaiting judgment, but Jesus opens the door and sets us free.

And yet, we can still choose to walk back into that prison cell. The door's been flung open by Jesus, but we can still go back and be enslaved to sin.

But thankfully, there is this great power that delivers, because Jesus not only sets us free, Jesus is able to keep us free. The door is still open, and he is able to take us out again.

Because if Jesus can deliver someone in the strongest grip of sin, like legion, then he can deliver anyone. But like legion, what we need to do, first of all, is to run to Jesus and fall before Jesus for help, which is exactly what legion does here.

So, first of all, we see the power that enslaves, but secondly, we also see the greater power that delivers in verse 11 to 16. So, how is legion set free by Jesus?

[13 : 30] Well, Jesus orders the impure spirit to come out of him, verse 8, and it happens. So, pick up from verse 11, a large herd of pigs was feeding on the nearby hillside.

The demons begged Jesus, send us among the pigs, allow us to go into them. He gave them permission, and the impure spirits came out and went into the pigs. The herd, about 2,000 in number, rushed down the steep bank into the lake, and were drowned.

So, Jesus sets legion free by sending the demons into the pigs. And so, we might be thinking, well, what's the deal with the pigs? Because modern readers are thinking, poor, little, innocent pigs.

Even some of us regions would be thinking, poor, innocent pigs. And yet, we shouldn't let the pigs hog the story. And here's why. Because at the time, people didn't have the same kind of sentimental, animal-loving perspective on life that many people do today.

They weren't thinking about the poor little pigs. They were thinking about the big waste of money. Because 2,000 pigs drowning off a hillside was an economic catastrophe.

[14 : 40] And so, let's not focus on the pigs. The focus here is on legion. Because this greater power of Jesus delivered him from being in possession. He was out of control, but was put under control by Jesus.

So look at verse 15. I love this verse. When they came to Jesus, they saw the man who had been possessed by the religion of demons sitting there, dressed, and in his right mind.

And they were afraid. What a contrast when you look back at verse 3 to 5, what the man was, to what he is now. Verse 15. He's a new man, delivered from his tragic, tortured state to sit at the feet of Jesus and in his right mind.

It's a great picture of the normality that Jesus brought to his life. Jesus is in that kind of business, isn't he? Repairing ruined lives.

So he repairs the ruins of this broken life by restoring this man to the person that God intended him to be. Because his one life was worth far more than a herd of about 2,000 pigs.

[15 : 51] And that's why the pigs, sorry, the demons going into the pigs, there couldn't be a better sign that his slavery was over than to see this happening. What had caused his life to be hell ran off the hillside never to be seen again.

So Jesus' power to control the destination of the demons was proof that his tortured life had ended. It was gone and everybody could see it. So the life turned upside down by demons was turned the right way up by Jesus Christ.

Because Jesus can transform any life no matter what the power that seems to enslave that life is. So there's no character that Jesus can't control.

There's no madness that Jesus can't subdue. There's no chain that Jesus can't break. There's no nakedness that Jesus can't clothe. There's no desire that Jesus can't tame.

There's no shame that Jesus can't dignify. There's no brokenness that Jesus can't heal. There's no legion that Jesus can't command. Because only Jesus has got the power to transform our broken lives and make them whole again.

[17 : 03] Only Jesus can do it. And guess what? Jesus delights to do this. He loves to do it. That's why he came into this world. So what Jesus is doing here in the sense that is showing how the kingdom of God has come near in him.

Because this vivid story takes us to the very heart of the gospel. Legion is a fantastic illustration of what we're all like by nature until Jesus Christ delivers us and saves us and sets us free.

And that's why the coming of Jesus is good news for unity and it's good news for our world. Because Jesus came to restore broken people. We were made in the image of God but that image has been marred by sin.

And so as a consequence we live in a fallen world where sin impacts everything and everyone. And so we are slaves to that sin. That's why we need to be delivered.

And by ourselves we are incapable of breaking this power that binds us and enslaves us. And yet a fantastic news illustrated here is that Jesus sets us free from the slavery to sin that destroys.

[18 : 19] And so if Jesus doesn't deliver us we're still a hostage in the kingdom of Satan rather than being someone rescued and delivered and belonging to the kingdom of God.

That's why becoming a Christian isn't like taking up a new hobby. It's not like deciding I'm going to become a member of the gym. It's not like taking something that you kind of bolt on to your life to make you a better version of you.

No. Becoming a Christian means being rescued from enemy territory. It means being set free from what we were enslaved to.

And that's why the Legion's Deliverance is a picture of every Christian conversion. Christian. It's just that here it's recorded in pop-up book form with dramatic side effects.

And so while our condition will be different in form, it's certainly no different in substance. And so it may not have been such a dramatic change for some of us becoming a Christian, just like it was for him, the exercise of demons into pigs, but it will just have been as real a change for us if we follow Jesus Christ.

[19 : 36] Because the power of Jesus is greater. And yet Jesus doesn't just deliver individuals from the power of sin in our lives.

Jesus came to defeat the power of evil in our world. And so by delivering and by restoring this one man, you get a glimpse or a trailer or a preview of the ultimate fate of all the forces of evil.

evil will be destroyed and this world will be restored and made new. Because the kingdom of God is a place of peace. It's a place of freedom. It's a place of full flourishing.

And so when Jesus returns, he will bring in this perfected kingdom and the powers of darkness and evil will be driven out forever. And that's good news, isn't it? So first of all, the power that enslaves.

Second, the greater power that delivers. And third, how to respond to that power in verse 17 to 20. Did you notice the different responses to Jesus at the end of this story?

[20 : 39] There's the response of the people and then there's the response of the demon-possessed man. And so verse 17, the people want Jesus to go. Then the people began to plead with Jesus to leave their region.

They are begging Jesus to go away. And it seems strange, doesn't it? Because Jesus has just transformed public enemy number one in their community. He's made them a peaceful and sane person, a good person to have arrived.

So they should have been celebrating. And yet they're afraid. Verse 15. So what are they afraid of? Well, they were more frightened of Jesus and his power than they were of Legion and his demons.

They couldn't handle the greater power of Jesus. Just like the disciples couldn't handle the greater power of Jesus when he calmed the storm. It was just too much.

And so it was clear to these people that having Jesus around was going to be a disturbance in their lives. And yet that's what Jesus Christ does. Jesus is always going to be a threat to our comfortable lives.

[21 : 47] Because the closer he comes to us, the more we realise our lives must change. Because Jesus disturbs our priorities, doesn't he?

And he forces us to choose what is most important in our lives. And so the closer he comes, the more uncomfortable it can be. And so many people are just afraid that Jesus wants to change their lives and so they want rid of him.

So perhaps you'd prefer a quiet and comfortable life rather than the upheaval that Jesus Christ brings. But this is like choosing slavery over freedom, even if we don't realise it.

that's why it's so tragic when men and women would rather cling to the sin which enslaves and ultimately destroys, instead of being sent free by Jesus.

And so the response of the people, let's know this, is that they wanted Jesus to go. And so that should be a warning to us. They're begging Jesus to go away, and so what did Jesus do?

[22 : 52] Verse 18, Jesus did go away. He got back in the boat and he left them. And that was judgment on them. They rejected Jesus Christ and so Jesus withdrew from them.

He was off. So that's the first response. The people want Jesus to go. The second response comes from the man. The man wants to go with Jesus. Verse 18, as Jesus was getting into the boat, the man who had been demon-possessed begged to go with him.

So instead of begging Jesus to go, he begged to go with Jesus. He wants to follow Jesus because of what Jesus has done for him. But Jesus wouldn't let him. Verse 19 and 20, Jesus didn't have led 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.

So the man went away and began to tell the Decapolis how much Jesus had done for him. And all the people were amazed. That's the first missionary that Jesus sent out.

And isn't that how powerful the gospel of Jesus Christ is? He is a former demon possessed man, a social misfit, but he has his life restored by Jesus.

[24 : 04] And then he's sent out by Jesus. And so he went away and he begins to tell people how much Jesus had done for him. And all the people were amazed. So isn't it true that it's only those who have experienced the deliverance that comes from Jesus Christ in their own lives, who can then go and talk about what Jesus Christ has done to other people.

But Jesus transforms our lives. We'll want to tell other people about it. And so what is your response to Jesus? Do you want Jesus to go like the people, or do you want to go with Jesus like Legion?

Because we've got to make the right response. Because our choice will determine our destiny. Because at the end of the Gospel of Mark, Jesus Christ goes to the cross.

And so while the account of the demon possessed man ends with him sitting there beside Jesus clothed and in his right mind on the cross, Jesus was stripped, naked, and killed.

Jesus was nailed to the cross, bleeding and crying out, and then when he died, he was placed in a tomb. So Jesus willingly gave up his life to defeat Satan, the devil, and sin, and death.

[25 : 27] And so as Jesus died on the cross, he faced the wrath of God and he absorbed evil, sin, and death into himself. He did it to wipe out all evil without wiping out us.

and he went into the tomb for us. And yet he rose from the dead, showing his power over Satan, and sin, and death, and assuring us that one day all evil will be destroyed.

And so when you see how Jesus came to deliver you at great cost to himself, then you need not doubt his infinite love for you.

And you need not doubt his power to change your life and to set you free from whatever you feel is enslaving you. And you have no reason to doubt his power to restore this broken world because Jesus is our only hope.

He's also the only hope for our world. And that's why he's coming, his life, his death, and his resurrection is such fantastic news. Let's pray.

[26 : 34] thank you. Thank you, our God, for sending Jesus Christ into this world. Thank you that he's coming. It's good news for our lives and good news for our world because Jesus is our only hope.

Thank you that we need not be enslaved and held captive to sin or any power in this world, but we can be set free. Our lives can be transformed and made new.

We can become the people that we were intended to be through faith in Jesus Christ. And so we thank you for sending your Son. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.