

Jesus Gives Legion a New Purpose in Life

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Preacher: Colin Dow

[0 : 00] Go home to your friends and tell them how much the Lord has done for you and how he has had mercy on you.

What is our meaning and purpose as human beings? Do you ever look up into the night sky and ponder the meaning of life?

It makes you feel small. And it makes you ask the question, what is my place in this universe? Would the moon and the stars even notice if I wasn't here?

What is my meaning? What is the purpose of my life? In these verses, we meet a man called Legion. He's a tragic figure.

He's been robbed of his purpose in living. He has been dehumanized. But then he meets Jesus and everything about him changes.

[1 : 03] For the first time in his life, he has a reason to live. He can look up into the night sky and say to the moon and to the stars, I'm worth something.

I mean something. Meeting Jesus changes everything about him, not the least of which is this. It gives him a reason to live.

And so again I ask, what is the meaning of your life? For what purpose do you exist? The man called Legion was going nowhere.

He was a dead man walking. But then he met Jesus and his whole life changed. Let me suggest that the most important thing for any of us today is that we too meet with Jesus.

Because when we meet with him, he changes everything about us, not the least of which is this. He gives us a reason to live.

[2 : 07] I want us to consider tonight the question of the difference meeting Jesus makes to our purpose in life under two headings. First, our purpose before Jesus, and second, our purpose after Jesus.

The search for meaning and purpose is the most basic of all human activities. Have you found your meaning and purpose in life?

Let Jesus change everything about you. Because I promise you, like Legion, Jesus will give you a reason to live.

First of all then, our purpose before Jesus, or our purpose without Jesus. Our purpose before Jesus. Legion cuts a most pathetic figure.

Even though he knew where he was, he was lost. Even though he was alive, he was dead. Even though he could see, he was blind.

[3 : 15] Legion was living in hell, while yet still alive. His mind was broken by the demons whose chains were tighter than any man could make them.

He lives in the tombs. He's uncontrollable. Everyone's afraid of him. He had superhuman strength and a superhuman voice with which every night he would cry out like a wounded dog.

He cut himself until the blood flowed. Before he met with Jesus, Legion lived for all the wrong things. He had been destroyed.

His life had no meaning. And his reasons for living were dark and destructive. He hated the world. And he hated himself even more.

Before he met with Jesus, Legion's life was a tragic mess. People who lived nearby would scare their children into obedience with stories of the wild monster who lived in the graveyard.

[4 : 20] He was a man of extremes. The devil is more subtle today. He doesn't expose himself so obviously. And yet, before any of us meet with Jesus, we are some way along the road to the same madness in which Legion lived.

As a whole, and in all its parts, our society smells of Legion's tragic darkness.

Let me suggest that before he met with Jesus, Legion lived for three things. Pain, death, and slavery. Pain, death, and slavery.

This unholy trinity was the reason, the meaning, and the purpose of his life. He lived, first of all, for pain.

For pain. Legion was a man in great pain. It's obvious that the demons who had taken control of his mind had driven him mad. He was displaying symptoms of what we would call today psychotic schizophrenia.

[5 : 29] But underlying his condition was a demonic influence immune to any human medication. His mind was broken. The greatest pain a person can endure is not physical.

It's always mental. When a person's mind turns against him, he kills himself mentally years before his body catches up.

Legion also experienced the social pain of being excluded from society. From what Jesus says in verse 19, it would seem that before Legion was possessed, he had friends and a family who loved him.

He was a son and a brother, a husband, a father. But now he's alone. He's afraid of everyone. And everyone's afraid of him. And then there's the physical pain.

He might have been a very strong man, but the unclean spirits within him gave him a superhuman strength. He broke every chain which bound him.

[6 : 39] His wrists and his ankles were scarred to the bone. And he cut himself with sharp stones. We would call this today self-harm.

But it wasn't slices with razor blades in his arms. He was stabbing himself with these sharp rocks. Poor, tragic man.

This is no man. He's just a concentration of torture. Here's the meaning of his life. Pain.

Now, Legion was a man of extremes. But scratch the surface of our society. And what do you find if not a world of mental, social, and physical pain?

For all our technology, the pain has just got worse. Our girls starve themselves to death to fit in with social norms.

[7 : 41] The older generation are so very lonely. And all the time, the working majority immunized themselves against this world's tragedies with the distractions of pleasure and entertainment.

Our pain may not be as extreme as that of Legion, but we're on the way there, are we not? Is that where you feel yourself to be tonight?

The concentration of torture? Mental? Social? Physical even? Legion was also living for death.

Living for pain, living for death. Legion cuts a sad figure by where he lived. He didn't feel at home among the living. He didn't belong with his family and friends.

He had more in common with the dead. So he lived in a cemetery. Perhaps he wanted to be dead. He envied the dead, their silence. Legion lived in a graveyard because at least there, at least in a graveyard, no one tries to chain him up.

[8 : 56] In a graveyard, he can get on with killing himself in peace. The comic strip, The Walking Dead, is the most successful box set drama of all time.

The Walking Dead, it's the story of a zombie infested world, how various groups of people try to survive. You know, make-up artists, they went to town transforming living actors into dead people walking.

I'd love to be an extra. Philadelphia, the first episode. The thing is, Legion would have needed no make-up to be an actor on The Walking Dead because he was dead on the inside and all that was left was for the outside to catch up.

He was just a concentration of darkness and death. Again, for all our society sanitizes death and removes it from common discussion, our society's fascinated with death.

Like a rabbit caught in the headlights, we are morbidly transfixed with our own mortality. The fear of death kills people while yet they live.

[10 : 12] It turns them into the walking dead. Make-up excluded. Atheism denies death's impact.

Humanism laughs it off. New Age spirituality confuses the boundary between living and dying. A life without Jesus is one foot in the grave without Victor Meldrum.

So, his purpose before he met Jesus was pain, death, and third, slavery. Slavery. This man, Legion, had lost any sense of who he was and what he was.

He had forgotten his own name. When Jesus asks him who he was, he replied, Legion, for we are many. He may be referring to the number of psychotic personalities he was experiencing, or more probably, he's referring to the number of unclean spirits within him.

Whatever, it's a tragic answer. Here's a man who was absolutely helpless against the darkness. They're in charge.

[11 : 25] They're commanding his every word and his actions. He has become the slave of this multitude of voices and these unclean spirits. He is no longer a man.

He is an object. He is a slave of the darkness. He hates them. They hate him. Perhaps he cut himself as an act of rebellion against these unclean spirits.

The pain was so intense, he had to call out. He's powerless. He's helpless. He's got nowhere to turn for comfort because the help he needed was the kind of help no human being could have provided him with.

He's a slave. He's the property of another. He is an animal who looks like a man for all his strength. He's powerless.

Again, we might not think of ourselves as slaves, but we're well on the way there. We're slaves to fear. We're slaves to societal pressures.

[12 : 31] We're slaves to social norms. As I said earlier, our girls are slaves to social media's presentation of the ideal young female.

Thin, happy, intelligent, empowered, and a party animal. But every human being is a slave to something more fundamentally evil even than Facebook.

Our addiction to moral and spiritual defeat. Our inability to change who we are on the inside. Poor, tragic humanity. For all we boast in our freedom.

We're as much slaves as Legion ever was. So, before Legion met with Jesus, he was this concentration of intense pain, death, and slavery.

He was not a man. He lived for these things. They were the reason for his life. Now, as I've said, Legion was a man of extremes, and none of us, to my knowledge, are where Legion was.

[13 : 39] But before we meet with Jesus, we are somewhere on the spectrum to where Legion was. Before we meet with Jesus and Jesus meets us, we've got so little purpose and so little meaning.

The moon and the stars look down and mock our hopeless destiny because without Jesus, we're no better than Legion. Is that where you are tonight?

Do you depress yourself with your lack of purpose and meaning? Do you cry yourself to sleep at night and say, What is the reason for me?

But you hear nothing back from your pillow. You've looked everywhere. You can't find anything that satisfies. Take heart.

Because Jesus is passing your way this evening, and he is offering you what the world does not offer and cannot offer. He is offering you a purpose for living.

[14 : 45] Do you dare believe Jesus? Do you dare believe the Jesus who has triumphed over death, overcome pain, and shattered the bonds of slavery? Do you?

Let's cast this question a whole different way. When our children go to secondary school, they learn that their purpose in life is to pass exams.

And having left school, their purpose in life is to get a job, to buy a house, to get married. And then it's to start a family and work toward financial security.

So we do all these things. And maybe you're in the process of doing all these things now. Then middle age strikes, and your kids begin to leave home, and you're getting letters offering you over-50s life cover from Sun Life.

Your purpose in life becomes making plans for your retirement. So then you retire. And your purpose in life becomes the golf club, the rotary club, or whatever other groups you want to join.

[15 : 52] By and large, even though you've achieved all these things you've set out to do, you still feel as if your life means something because you can help out with the grandchildren from time to time.

But then ill health strikes, and new age worries begin. You come face to face with your own death, and perhaps for the first time in your life you think to yourself, what really is the meaning of my life?

Has any of this been worth it? And you cannot give an answer because there's no answer you can give. The meaning of your life at that point is all in the past.

You've done everything you set out to do. What have you got to look forward to now? Is this it? This is life without Christ.

A life with no higher purpose and no higher meaning. It might seem full, just like legions seem to be alive, but it's an empty life, a hopeless life.

[17 : 11] Our purpose before Jesus. Well, secondly, our purpose after Jesus, or perhaps better, our purpose with Jesus. Our purpose after Jesus.

The change in Legion's life was very dramatic. Like it's not, it won't be as dramatic in our case because I would hope none of us have ever been as tragic as Legion was before he met with Jesus.

And yet, it will be dramatic in its own way because for the first time we'll have a purpose bigger than ourselves to live for. We'll be able to look up into the night sky, and when the moon and the stars try to make us feel small, we'll be able to say to them, but I have a reason to live, but I have a purpose for my existence.

My life has a satisfying meaning to it. After Jesus had cast the demons out of Legion, his neighbors found him sitting there, dressed, and in his right mind, verse 15.

Legion was a new man, and all because he had met with Jesus. He had a new purpose in living. No more living for pain, for death, and for slavery.

[18 : 27] He now had a higher meaning for his life, one which filled his life with joy and enthusiasm. Let's explore that new meaning together, and then let me make, let me invite you to make it your new meaning in life, to make Legion's story your story.

After he met with Jesus, and Jesus changed him, Legion lived for two things, mercy and mission.

Mercy and mission. And we find both meanings in verse 19, where Jesus says to Legion, go home to your friends, and tell them how much the Lord has done for you, and how he's had mercy upon you.

Mercy, first of all. Legion lived for mercy. Jesus summarized his healing of Legion in these words, the Lord has done for you, how he's had mercy on you.

What a change has come about in the life of this man, Legion. The mercy of God has transformed him into a man, who is now seated, dressed, and in his right mind.

[19 : 42] Here's God's mercy at work in the life of a man, formerly known as Legion. He was once bound by chains, but had broken them all. He's now seated and calm.

He once run around stark naked, but he's now dressed. He was once demented, crying out, cutting himself, stabbing himself with sharp stones.

Now, he's in his right mind. Nothing is able to effect such a miraculous change in the life of a man other than the sovereign mercy of God.

Now the man has a purpose he did not have before. Having experienced the mercy of God in transforming him from the monster he once had been to the man he now is, his purpose and meaning is to continue living out that mercy.

To continue living out that mercy. Not to put too fine a point in it. To keep his clothes on. To keep calm. To stay in his right mind.

[20 : 53] Not to go back to the life he had before, but to grow into this new life given him by the mercy of God. To become a useful, contributing member of his society.

Someone who can be trusted as a friend. Loved as a husband. The man has got a purpose to make the most of the life Jesus has given him.

And not to go back to the old. Now this may all seem so mundane. But you know, society as a whole and our lives as individuals are made up of a million ordinary things like home, work, and play.

Like using our money and our time wisely. Like telling the truth. Like living an upright life. Like paying our taxes. Like treating others like we ourselves want to be treated.

It seems so simple. But after Jesus has shown us mercy, this is our purpose. Some Christians have done spectacular things for Jesus, but the vast majority of us aren't called to do spectacular things for him.

[22 : 13] Rather, our purpose is to get on with living ordinary lives for him. In 1 Thessalonians 4, verse 11, the apostle Paul urges Christians, listen to his words, he says, aspire to live quietly and to mind your own affairs and to work with your hands.

What's my purpose now that God has done his work of mercy in my life? It's to get on with loving my family and my friends. To be hard working in my university classroom or in my workplace, to pay my taxes, to be active in his church, and to mind my own business.

Is this not enough for us? I've met so many Christians over the years who want to do something so extraordinary for Jesus that they forget to do the ordinary things for Jesus.

Forgetting, actually, Jesus calls us to be ordinary for him. If we return to the man who formerly had been called Legion 25 years after the events described in Mark 5 and we found him back in the graveyard naked, cutting himself with stones and acting like a madman again, he would have frustrated the purpose Jesus had given him.

But if we find him at home, having paid his taxes, putting his feet up after a hard day's work with his family and his friends around him, eating food his own money has provided, then he would have lived out the mercy of Christ in his life.

[24 : 03] Faithfulness to Christ in the ordinary things of life. that's how to live out the mercy of God. Our purpose after Jesus is mercy, living out his mercy, but secondly, it's mission.

Mission. Jesus says to the man, go home to your friends and tell them how much the Lord has done for you and how he's had mercy on you. Go tell.

And this is the essence of what we call evangelism, mission. Go and tell how much the Lord has done for you, how he's had mercy upon you. The man formerly known as Legion, whose life had been a tangle of dark meanings, was now living for the greatest of all purposes.

Go and tell the world about Jesus. Go and tell the world about Jesus. Tell your family and tell your friends.

about Jesus. The word tell here carries two emphases. The first is to give an account, a story of what happened to him.

[25 : 20] The second is to proclaim, to make publicly known what had happened to him. Put them together, you have this. This man was to proclaim to his family and friends and anyone who would listen the great mercy of God and tell him the story of what God had done for him, of how once he had been a slave to pain, death, and slavery, but now he is healed.

this is the essence of mission, to proclaim the great mercy of God and Christ by testifying to how God has healed us and given us new life in him.

As this man looked up into the night sky, what as once he had screamed in madness, he can now say to Orion and to the Plough and to the Pleiades, he can say to them, I have meaning and purpose.

I have to go and tell what Jesus has done for me. It's a higher purpose than he could ever have dreamed, to proclaim to his friends the mercy of God and to invite him to share in his new life.

Earlier on, we talked about our life cycle and how eventually there comes a point in everyone's life where the question of whether their life means anything comes to mind.

[26 : 48] This often comes in the latter part of someone's life, when their health fails and they feel that their usefulness to society is diminished. But can you see the genius of Jesus' higher meaning for our lives?

For whether we are young or whether we are old, we can go and tell. Sometimes the greatest testimonies to the mercy of Jesus aren't witnessed in packed arenas with famous evangelists but in hospital rooms where a loving family has gathered round a dying Christian relative only for him to say to them, God has been faithful to me.

Now, my children, put your faith in him. Some of you know exactly what I'm talking about because some of you here have been there. Oh, it lacks the romance of Victorian mission stories but it's more powerful still.

This sick, dying, weak person who otherwise would have no purpose in life at this evening stage has this left to do to tell his children and grandchildren how much the Lord has done for him and how great God's mercy is.

Now, this dying man, he never stood up in front of huge crowds to preach the gospel. Rather, by his ordinary faithfulness in the lifelong things providing for his family, loving his wife, working hard, being a faithful friend, he has lived out the mercy of God in real life.

[28 : 30] His testimony, though, reaches far beyond his achievements. His testimony point to the achievements of his Savior, Jesus Christ, who by his death on the cross, pardoned all his sins and gave him a new life which shall never end.

What then is your meaning and purpose in life? It's a clear night tonight. When you leave here, if the streetlights allow, look up into the sky and see the moon.

Did you see the blood-red moon the other night? And then look at the stars and the great constellations of Orion, the Pleiades, Leo. They mock you from heaven.

Look into your mind. What does your mind tell you your mission and purpose in life is? The world around us doesn't have an answer to this question, so it doesn't ask the question.

But we as Christians, we have the answer, so we may ask the question, what is your reason for living? It is to live in the mercy of God and commit yourself to the mission of God.

[29 : 52] If you're not yet a Christian here this evening, will you accept Jesus' invitation to trust in Him and to become a new person? And if you are already a Christian, will you join with me in recommitting yourself to these two great aims?

Mercy with mission.