

Hope in the face of evil

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[0 : 00] Today's reading is from Mark chapter 5, verses 1 to 20, page 1013. They came to the other side of the lake, to the country of the Gerasenes.

And when Jesus had stepped out of the boat, immediately there met him out of the tombs, a man with an unclean spirit. He lived among the tombs, and no one could bind him any more, not even with a chain, for he had often been bound with shackles and chains, but he wrenched the chains apart, and he broke the shackles in pieces.

No one had the strength to subdue him. Night and day, among the tombs and on the mountains, he was always crying out and cutting himself with stones.

And when he saw Jesus from afar, he ran and fell down before him. And crying out with a loud voice, he said, What have you do to me, Jesus, son of the most high God?

I adieu you by God, do not torment me. For he was saying to him, Come out of the man, you unclean spirit. And Jesus asked him, What is your name?

[1 : 23] He replied, My name is Legion, for we are many. And he begged him earnestly not to send them out of the country. Now a great herd of pigs was feeding there on the hillside, and they begged him, saying, Send us to the pigs.

Let us enter them. So he gave them permission, and the unclean spirits came out and entered the pigs. And the herd, numbering about two thousand, rushed down the steep bank into the sea and were drowned in the sea.

The herdsmen fled and told it in the city and in the country. And people came to see what it was that had happened. And they came to Jesus and saw the demon-possessed man, the one who had had the legion, sitting there, clothed and in his right mind.

And they were afraid. And those who had seen it described to them what had happened to the demon-possessed man and to the pigs. And they began to beg Jesus to depart from their region.

As he was getting into the boat, the man who had been possessed with demons begged him that he might be with him. And he did not permit him, but said to him, Go home to your friends and tell them how much the Lord has done for you and how he has had mercy on you.

[2 : 42] And he went away and began to proclaim in the Decapolis how much Jesus had done for him. And everyone marvelled. Thanks, Ashley, very much.

And can I add my welcome? My name is Phil. I'm one of the ministers here. Particular welcome to you if this is your first time with us. I wonder what you make of that reading.

Let's just pray as we begin. Father in heaven, we long to hear you speak to our hearts. Please open our hearts to your word and open your word to our hearts.

And we ask it in Jesus' name. Amen. I'm going to give you a quote to begin with. Let's see how you do.

How many years can a mountain exist before it is washed to the sea? Yes, and how many years can some people exist before they're allowed to be free?

[3 : 47] How many years must one man have before he can hear people cry? Yes, and how many deaths will it take till he knows that too many people have died?

The answer, my friend, is blowing in the wind. It's quite a beautiful song. Bob Dylan looking at the evil in the world And asking how long?

And how will it ever change? The subject of our time today is hope in the face of evil. Is there any? Is the answer just blowing in the wind?

The Bible speaks of two sources of evil in the world. Number one, the human heart.

Selfish to the core. But it also speaks of a second source of evil in the world that is external to us. Actually, the original source of evil.

[4 : 58] It speaks of Satan. And it is on this second source of evil, the original source of evil, that we are going to spend our time just in the next few minutes.

We cannot come to this subject of hope in the face of evil. And we cannot fully understand the world we live in or the predicament that we're in unless we are prepared to deal with the reality of Satan's existence.

I always find it hard to teach on this subject because as Westerners, many of us, or many of us under the influence of Western thoughts, we don't believe in Satan.

The idea of him seems to us fanciful. We are materialists. We believe in what we can see. And if we can't see it, it's not there.

And can I speak to the Christians here as well? Certainly white Westerners, Christians. We do not tend to think about ourselves, do we? Of having been rescued from Satan's grip as well as from sin by the Lord Jesus.

[6 : 17] Or if we do, it's something we don't understand or give much airtime to. The reason is that Satan is an invisible enemy.

My kids like watching Doctor Who. I can't get into it myself. It's a bit weird. But they like it. And there is an episode called The Invisible Enemy where an intelligent virus intends to spread across the universe, et cetera.

The Bible describes Satan as the prince of the power of the air. Do you know that? The prince of the power of the air.

That's the Bible's description of Satan. And that is a pretty terrifying description when you think about it. Like the air all around, he is invisible.

He does not wear red tights. Or carry a three-pronged fork. Like the air all around, his influence is everywhere and yet easily forgotten.

[7 : 28] It's quiet and yet inescapable. The prince of the power of the air. He is a spiritual enemy. C.S. Lewis put it like this.

He said that Satan's greatest achievement in the West is to persuade us that he doesn't exist. Well, this passage is hugely important for us, whoever we are, whether we're Christian here today or whether we're looking into the Christian faith.

Because it brings into view what is normally invisible. It turns up the volume on a normally inaudible tune. Because we get here an extreme historical case of demon possession.

So this is not a normal occurrence. We don't see this in Dulwich or around the surrounding areas all that much. Most of us will never have seen anything this extreme.

But the point is that these encounters between the Son of God and demons, they display visibly the largely invisible work of Satan in the world.

[8 : 42] If you like, they bring out into the open what is normally concealed from us by an enemy who is far too clever for us. If you like, Jesus is outing Satan here.

You want to know what Satan stands for. You want to know what he's really doing in the world. Here it is. And so, therefore, this miracle is working like the other miracles in the gospel.

It really happens. This was a real man. But it also points to a greater salvation rescue that we all need.

The philosopher Rousseau said this. He said, man is born free and everywhere is in chains. But the Bible stands in flat contradiction to that.

But the Bible says we are not born free, but born into a kind of spiritual captivity to Satan. It calls it the domain of darkness.

[9 : 47] So as we look at this passage, we're going to see two things. The real work of Satan in the world. Satan outed. And the wonderful power of Jesus to save us.

Okay, we're going to start with the real work of Satan in the world. Four lessons. Number one, Satan is too strong for us, both individually and collectively.

I think we see that there. Just look down with me at verse three. This man lived among the tombs and no one could bind him anymore, not even with a chain.

For he'd often been bound with shackles and chains, but he wrenched the chains apart and he broke the shackles in pieces. No one had the strength to subdue him. Okay, so they tried everything to bind this man up.

That is to constrain the threat, presumably so that this man was no longer a danger to others. The authorities had tried every kind of chain.

[10 : 52] But this man had something like superhuman strength. That's the point. And there was no door that could hold him. Now, I think there's a bigger lesson here, which is that no matter how strong our chains are, we can't lock evil up.

And history has taught us this, right? We are helpless against it. We cannot contain evil.

Abolish one slave trade and another springs up. Defeat one evil regime and another springs up. Put one violent gang in prison, another springs up.

Our laws are impotent to change anything. I was looking at the statistics for violent knife crime in London. In the last seven years, violent knife crime has increased in London by 53%, despite all our campaigns, laws and efforts to the contrary.

Satan will be there to infect every technological advance and to ensure that it is put to evil use. History has taught us that.

[12 : 14] Satan will be there to infect every political regime. Just think of all the philosophies that have been tried. There's no hope in the philosophies of man.

He is simply too strong for us, both individually and collectively. We cannot contain him. We cannot get rid of him.

He is beyond human power. Secondly, he destroys us. His agenda is to destroy us.

Just look again at this man. And we see this, the volume's being turned up to Satan's agenda. Look at what's repeated. The man met him out of the tombs, verse 2.

He lived among the tombs, verse 3. Verse 5, night and day among the tombs. Why does Mark draw this detail out for us?

[13 : 11] To show us that Satan's agenda is to drag this man down to death. It is macabre, right? It's like something out of a horror film.

But the impact of Satan on this man is that now he sees his home as among the dead, verse 3. And if Satan has his way, this man will soon become one of those tombs.

This has always been the agenda of Satan for mankind. To drag us down to death. Ever since Genesis 3, the very beginning of the Bible story.

There is nothing that he would love more than to see every individual brought down to death, to judgment, unforgiven. What a friend to have.

Notice there's also self-destruction. You see that in verse 5? It's a pitiful picture. This man always crying out and cutting himself with stones.

[14 : 20] Self-harm? Deforming himself? Destroying himself? Oh, that's Satan's work. Satan will turn us against ourselves.

Think of the suicide rates. Suicidal thoughts. Now, we're not saying that people who commit suicide are possessed by demons. But what are we saying?

We're saying Satan has his fingerprints all over that. Self-destruction. Think of the self-destruction that we see all around us.

Well, that's Satan's fingerprints there. Because his brutal and ruthless agenda is to destroy us. Thirdly, he dehumanizes us.

Do you see that in verse 5? I mean, what is this man now? He's mad. He's crying out. Out of his mind. He's isolated from others.

[15 : 21] That is Satan's impact on us. To isolate us from others. This man is probably naked, running around. We see later he's clothed for the first time.

He's living like an animal. No human dignity. Again, this man is an extreme case. But the point is that this is what Satan wants to do to us.

Not only to destroy us by taking us to death, but to destroy every remnant of human dignity for which we were created by a good God. Think for a moment of this person.

This person had had family and friends. We know that once this person was a person with dignity.

Think of him as a boy, a child loved by his parents. Now utterly unrecognizable. Satan's agenda for all people under his power.

[16 : 26] He will be quite happy to see us in the end. Nothing more than the shell of a human being that we were meant to be. And fourthly, I think we learn the lesson here that his tactic is to blind us to the goodness of God and of Jesus his son.

As I read verse 7, who do you think is speaking? Good question. The demon or the man? Verse 7, just look down. Crying out with a loud voice. He said, What have you to do with me, Jesus, son of the most high God?

I adjure you by God. Do not torment me. Who do you think is saying that? The demon or the man? Well, the he has been the man in verses 1 to 6.

I take it in verse 7. There's no reason to think that that has changed. And yet it is clear that the demon is speaking through the man at the same time. So what do we make of this?

Well, man and demon have become so merged in identity as to be almost indistinguishable. So that it is the man who says to Jesus, What have you to do with me?

[17 : 38] Do not torment me. Yes, it's the demon through the man. But also the man captured by the demon who says it. So it is a captivity of his mind that confirms in the man, it runs deep.

It's a captivity of his mind that confirms in the man that he wants nothing to do with Jesus. What have you to do with me? And it is a captivity that confirms in him that Jesus means to do him harm.

Do you see that in verse 7? Have you? Do not torment me. this man does not want to part with the evil inside him he doesn't ask for help well this is the work of Satan too to persuade us that we would be better off without God and without his son and that we should have nothing to do with him just as he did in this man he blinds us to the goodness of Jesus just think about it for a second here is the one standing before him who has come to set him free forever and this man thinks he's come to torment him I think we see this same reaction in the crowd in verse 17 you see that bizarre reaction they've just seen this incredible miracle and the community gathered together begs Jesus to leave them what have you to do with us showing that who they would rather be with well how true it is this strange reaction that we have we all have personally and we all see it around us to Jesus it's like a repulsion a knee-jerk response and maybe there are people here today who've come with a deep assumption that if there is a God all he would want to do is ruin your life why do so many stay away from church they don't want to walk through the door don't want to talk about it why in our workplaces in schools people just don't want to talk about it in part there is a spiritual influence here

Satan will do what he can to keep us away from Jesus and from the forgiveness and the restoration and the freedom that he brings it is why it is why by the way that we shouldn't give up on someone whose initial reaction is to say this has nothing to do with me Satan's at work in the world that's what Satan does to us blinds us to the goodness the beauty of Jesus well so Satan's brutal and ruthless agenda for us is to destroy us body, mind and soul this isn't just about that man the Bible says this is all of us by nature born into captivity following the prince of the power of the air secondly though the wonderful power of Jesus just see how effortless it is

I love this verse 10 the demon or the 2000 of them beg him earnestly not to send them out of the country who's in charge verse 13 he gave them permission many people think that you know if there is a battle between Satan and God that it's sort of a Star Wars-esque kind of close run thing that you need sort of 17 hours of storyline to get to the end of just see how I mean this wouldn't make a particularly good film would it off you go like brushing a spider from the shoulder so Jesus brushes Satan aside in Christ Satan has met his nemesis the one with all the authority of the creator to do what he wants he knows his game is up the only thing he can do is raise the white flag well three things we see here the wonderful power of

[22 : 23] Jesus number one to set us free verse 15 do you see that it's a beautiful picture of this man clothed in his right mind well that's what he can do for all of us today what a picture of peace and tranquility no longer under the whip of Satan but restored dignity do you see that clothed in his right minds just imagine this man for a second I've been thinking this week imagine him talking for the first time in years and making sense what did he say thank you perhaps sharing his real name with those around asking after his family clothed and in his right mind he's been released from the nightmare of captivity to Satan and there is a sense in which when a person repents that is to turn around and come back to God and put their faith in Christ it is like waking up from a madness a kind of madness a bit like what

Charlie was talking about earlier and for the first time seeing the world as it is understanding flooding in about myself and the world and most importantly about God who made me clothed and in his right mind and so we see here one of the things it means to be saved by Jesus is to be set free restored forever to be the human being that God made you to be free to enjoy God and his creation forever secondly transformed this man had seen his home among the tombs but notice that he doesn't want to go back to his home do you see that in verse 18 he doesn't want to go back to where he was born as he was getting to the boat the man possessed of the demons who had been possessed begged

Jesus that he might be with him he has a new home it's with Jesus transformed this man full of gratitude and awe at having experienced the power of Jesus and this is the impact of Jesus on everyone whom he sets free from the power of Satan every Christian becomes someone who longs for nothing more than to be with Jesus forever that's the impact Jesus has and indeed it is the best thing about heaven Jesus says elsewhere that they may be with me and where I am that's the future for the Christian and yet did you see what Jesus says to him very strange verse 19 he did not permit him but said go and tell your friends surprising response of Jesus in the context of the wider story

Jesus is saying yes but not yet to his desire to be with him that day will come for this man but in the meantime there is work to be done go and tell your family again that is what he does in all people who he sets free transforms them to long to be with him but gives them a job in the meantime go and tell and I love the response of this man because did you notice Jesus says go and tell your friends but he goes and tells it in the Decapolis ten cities the whole region gets to hear his story of just how much Jesus has done for him thirdly Jesus' wonderful power to give hope hope of a day when evil will be no more one day

Jesus will destroy the power of Satan and destroy Satan forever when he comes again the Bible says to bring his kingdom of peace which will be forever just as he drowned these demons in the sea so he in the end will drown Satan forever no more evil there is hope in the face of evil the answer is not blowing in the wind it is right here in front of us with the Lord Jesus Christ three brief implications as I close now and there will be time for questions I know a lot of what I've been saying probably will be raising questions I'd love to try and answer them three brief implications if you're here today and you are looking into the Christian faith it's so good you're with us I think this passage asks you this question who do you want who do you want to rule your life

[27 : 59] Satan or Jesus there's only two options you've seen Satan's agenda you've seen Jesus's agenda for you who do you want and for those of us who are believers already in the Lord Jesus just a couple of implications number one we were much more lost than we often think how much do we think about this element of Jesus's salvation not only from sin not only from judgment not only from death but also from that great enemy who was there at the beginning bent on our destruction and whose power we could do nothing about and so I think this should fill us with a fresh thanksgiving to Jesus for setting us free and as we go back home or whatever we're doing this afternoon perhaps not necessarily literally to be skipping but actually we're a free man a free woman praise the

Lord Jesus has set us free and then lastly for the Christian a reminder here of the work that Jesus has given all of us until he comes again but notice the message interestingly that Jesus sends him out with how much the Lord has done for you it's a great motivation and it's a great message for those of us who are Christian with a colleague with a friend in our workplaces can I tell you just how much Jesus has done for me can I tell you what difference he's made to my life well I'm going to pause there let me say a prayer and then we're going to sing again I think Ben you're going to come up and tell us what we're doing let's pray father in heaven we thank you for the glorious power of Jesus not only to save us from sin and death but also from Satan from everything that went wrong at the beginning to bring us freedom to bring us back our humanity to bring us into an everlasting hope and father pray for each of us here today that you would help us to see just how good

Jesus is and we ask it in his name amen