

...save us from Satan

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[0 : 00] It's well and truly that time of year, isn't it? The Christmas season is upon us. We're in full swing. We've had the Black Friday sales, which actually started on Thursday and finished on Monday.

Why are they called Friday? I don't know. And here at church, the decorations have even started to go up. We've got the tree, we've got the pew decorations. I think there's more coming. That's happening in the church, in the shops as well.

And in the church calendar, we're in now what is called the season of Advent. The word Advent, some of you may know, comes from the Latin word *Aventus*, which means coming or arrival. And so last Friday morning, for example, Booth was waiting for the advent of his second child and he arrived, young Oscar. Advent is a time of the church calendar where we especially remember the coming or arrival of Jesus born at Christmastime.

We even start singing Christmas carols, which speak of his birth. I've mixed a couple of titles up. See if you can recognize them. Here's one title. Angels Sing, Herald Hark.

[1 : 08] It's too straightforward. All right. God's Gentleman, Merry Rest You. Yeah, all right. Joy. Yeah. OK. See, they're so well known, aren't they?

And carols actually remind us of why Jesus was born, what he was born to do. So on the next slide is a verse from God Rest You, Merry Gentlemen. And notice what it says there.

For Jesus Christ, our Savior, was born on Christmas Day to save us all from Satan's power when we had gone astray. Oh, tidings of comfort and joy.

Yeah. And so what we're going to be doing in this Advent series is looking at pictures from Mark's gospel that show us what Jesus was born to do, like save us from Satan's power.

And so that's why the title slide. No, just go back. Sorry, Ryan. The title slide says the Advent or arrival of the king who dot dot dot. And as I said, we'll see today saves us from Satan.

[2 : 09] Or more importantly, like the Bible says on the next slide now. Thanks, Ryan. The reason the son of God appeared, that's Christmas, was to destroy the devil's work.

See, Jesus came to save us from Satan's power, you see. And this is what we see in our second reading from Mark chapter five. We're going to work pretty quickly through chapter five.

And then we'll need to look at other parts of the Bible, because this is more of a topical talk than a straight working through the passage talk. So we're at point one where Jesus saves a man visibly under Satan's power.

Verse one to five. We heard before that 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 bind him anymore, not even with a chain. We had often been chained hand and foot, but he tore the chains apart and broke the irons on his feet.

[3 : 07] 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. Here is a man who is the epitome of impure or unclean.

First, he lives in the region of the Gerasenes, which was a Gentile place full of unclean things for Jews, like a herd of pigs that we'll meet later. Second, he lives among the tombs where there are dead bodies and dead bodies were also unclean for Jews.

In fact, Luke even adds that he was naked. And then third, and most of all, he had an impure or literally an unclean spirit in him. And as we'll see, it's a legion of demons.

And although it meant he could, as one guy in my Bible study group said last week, he could act like the Incredible Hulk and snap chains apart, it also meant he lived a life of torment and agony, doesn't he?

Verse five, do you see that? Night after night, he would cry out and cut himself with stones. His life was a hell of a life. But it's this man, verse two, who runs to meet Jesus.

[4 : 20] And can you imagine being there on that day, being one of the disciples, perhaps? You just stepped out of the boat and then down comes from this hill, a naked, insane, screaming man hurtling towards you.

I think it was me. I'd say, oh, Jesus, I think I left something back in the boat. I'm just going to... But verse six, 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. For Jesus had said to him, come out of this man, you impure spirit. 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 them out of the area. A large herd of pigs was feeding on the nearby hillside.

The demons begged Jesus, send us among the pigs and allow us to go into them. He gave them permission. And the impure spirits came out and went in the pigs.

[5 : 19] The herd, about 2,000 in number, rushed down the steep bank into the lake and was drowned. Now, Mark's purpose at this part of his gospel is to show us who Jesus is.

That he is the king, the Christ, the son of God who has God's power. And boy, isn't it obvious here? I mean, did you notice all the ways in which we see Jesus's power?

I mean, first of all, the legion kneels before Jesus, acknowledging that Jesus is greater in verse 6. Then in verse 7, he calls Jesus the son of the most high God and pleads not to be tortured, even though he'd been torturing this man day and night.

And then in verse 10, they beg Jesus again and again not to be sent out of the area. Or in Luke's account, it says to be sent into the abyss, which is the prison for Satan and demons.

Or verse 13, they need permission from Jesus. You see, it's clear who the more powerful one is, isn't it? No one in the village was strong enough to subdue him, we were told at the end of verse 4.

[6 : 29] But here is this man now kneeling and begging and asking for permission to Jesus. Jesus is the king, the son of God who has God's power, even over Satan.

And he has come to save people from Satan, like this man. You see verse 14? It's quite a contrast, isn't it?

This man who was once violent, naked and tormented is now sitting, dressed in his right mind. In other words, his life is restored.

And people are afraid. I mean, they had tried to control this guy with chains before, but no one was strong enough. He just snapped them.

Then this guy called Jesus comes along and not only controls him, but also cures him with just his words. I mean, if we saw such divine power in a person, I think we too would be wary, wouldn't we?

[7 : 53] We'd just kind of be a bit cautious. And so I don't think their fear in Jesus is a bad thing here. For it recognises that Jesus is no ordinary person.

And he isn't, is he? But that's what Mark wants us to see. Now, the fear isn't bad. What is, though, is their next response. Verse 16.

Those who had seen it told the people what had happened to the demon-possessed man and told about the pigs as well. Then the people began to plead or beg Jesus to leave their region.

It's a sad state of affairs when people beg God to go away, isn't it? It seems that these people would have preferred to live amongst evil, you know, this man with evil spirits, than have their lives changed or suffer loss.

In this case, financial loss with their pigs. And sadly, it's the same with people today, isn't it? People seem to prefer having evil in their lives rather than God change their lives and perhaps risk suffering some sort of loss.

[9 : 08] Not pigs, but perhaps persecution from colleagues or family or friends. But on the other hand, the one who has been saved from Satan, from his hell of a life, well, look at how he responds in verse 18.

As Jesus was getting into the boat, the man who had been demon-possessed begged to go with him. Jesus did not let him, but said, Go home to your own people and tell how much the Lord has done for you and how he's had mercy on you.

So the man went away and began to tell in the Decapolis how much Jesus had done for him. And all the people were amazed. While the people, the townspeople begged Jesus to go away, this man

begged Jesus to stay, to stay with him, to go and follow him.

But at this point of Jesus' mission, his priority was to go to the Jews first. He hadn't really reached the Gentiles yet. And so he tells this man to go home and tell what the Lord has done for him.

And this man knows who the Lord is. He's experienced that. It's Jesus. And so he goes, he obeys and tells everyone all that the Lord Jesus has done for him.

[10:25] It's a pretty good response, isn't it? But the question now becomes, how does all this apply to us? Because this picture of Jesus saving someone from Satan's power is not really how he saves us, is it?

I mean, we were not demon possessed like this man, were we? Some people say that, I've heard people say mental health issues are a form of demon possession, but that's not true.

Because even Christians can suffer from mental health issues and we cannot be possessed. For we have God's Spirit, who, Spirit of Christ, clearly stronger. And I don't think this sort of thing happens as much in our society here in Melbourne as it did in Jesus' society in his day.

Though, I have to say, if people play around with the occult and invite evil into their lives, then they'll probably get it. But for several reasons, it's not as common in our society here in Melbourne today.

And so how were we under Satan's power? Point two. And here's where we need to look further afield at the Bible. And there we see that Satan has two powers, really.

[11:38] First, he has the power to lead people away from God into sin and spiritual death. And so on the next slide, in Revelation chapter 12, it says the devil or Satan who leads the whole world astray.

That's what he does. Or on the next slide, in Ephesians chapter 2, it talks about how we were spiritually dead in sin. Why? Well, because we followed the ways, not just of this world, but also the ruler of the kingdom of air.

That is Satan, who is still at work in non-Christians, keeping them in sin and spiritual death. But how does Satan lead us away from God into sin and spiritual death?

Well, by deceiving and tempting people, which I'm sure you know. This is what we saw in our first reading from Genesis 3, wasn't it? Do you remember Genesis 3, where Satan and the serpent subtly deceived Adam and Eve as saying, Did God really say you must not eat from any tree?

See, when God actually said, you are free to eat from every tree except one. He twists God's word. And then he said, you won't surely die, knowing full well that when they sin, they would spiritually die.

[12:57] He deceives. And he tempts and appeals to people's sinful desires. So he says, when you eat from it, your eyes will be open and you'll be like God.

There's loads of people in our world who would be like to be like God, you know, in control of our own lives. It appeals to our desires. In fact, in Genesis 3, we were told that when Eve saw the fruit as desirable for gaining wisdom like God, then they took and ate it.

He appeals to desires, you see. He even could have appealed to peer pressure. I saw this cartoon on the next slide, which I thought was amusing.

You might not get it. But anyway, there's a serpent in the top left hand corner and he's saying to Adam, every single person in the world has tried it but you. Oh, you got it. I sit at the morning services and they go, huh?

That's not what he did though, right? But that's how he acts. He deceives and tempts and if he needs to, uses peer pressure to lead people away from God into sin and spiritual death.

[14:06] He continues to work the same way today. He whispers in people's minds, oh God can't be true. Look at all the injustice in the world. Or, what will your friends and family think if you go to church?

It's not worth it. Or, look at how much more fun and freedom you can have without God. Or, surely love means you can pursue any type of relationship.

Or, look, you're lonely or unemployed or suffering. Does God really work for your good? Now I can show you from the Bible that they are all lies.

And I can show you from life that they are not a better way to live. The lies don't actually work. But, the point is, this is how Satan leads and keeps people away from God and into sin and spiritual death.

Now I need to add at this point that people willingly believe his lies. You know, people often say that phrase, what is it? The devil made me do it. Well, he deceived and tempted, but you sure went

along with it.

[15:19] But you see, this is his first power, to lead us away from God into sin and spiritual death. And his second power is not to look after those he leads astray, but then to accuse us of sin and then demand our judgment.

So, on the next slide, we read from Hebrews chapter 2, that the power of him who holds the power of death is the devil. That is, he has the power to demand our eternal death.

He's like the prosecutor in a courtroom who accuses us of being guilty of sin and then demands the judge sentence us to eternal death.

What the Bible calls hell. Now people have all sorts of ideas about hell. When we were talking at home one time about heaven and hell, my youngest daughter said her idea of hell is a busy playground with only one swing.

But sadly, it's actually much, much worse than that. Jesus described it as a place of weeping and gnashing of teeth. At Wednesday at 2, our Wednesday service, we've been going through the book of Revelation.

[16:37] And on the next slide, have a look at how it's described there. You know, the person who rejects Jesus will drink the wine of God's wrath, poured full strength into the cup of his anger, and they or he will be tormented with fire and sulfur in the presence of the holy angels in the presence of the Lamb.

And the smoke of their torment goes up forever and ever, and they have no rest day or night. That's horrific, isn't it? The demon-possessed man led a hell of a life under Satan's power, but those who reject Christ and follow the exceptions and temptations of Satan, well, we will suffer an actual hell of a life.

Which is why Christmas is such good news. Because at Christmas time, we remember the advent, the arrival of the king, who was born on Christmas Day to save us all from Satan's power when we had gone astray.

How? Well, this time it's not by his word, as it was with the demon-possessed man, but it's by his death. So on the next slide, the fuller verse from that Hebrews one, says, since the children have flesh and blood, he, that is Jesus, two shared in their humanity.

That's Christmas. He became human. So that he could die for us, and by his death, he might break the power of him who holds the power of death.

[18:12] That is, the devil. You see, Jesus was born as one of us, so that he could grow up and die in place of us.

And in his death, to take our judgment, to suffer hell instead of us. And now that our sins have been paid for, now that our judgment has been taken, then Satan no longer has any power to demand we take it.

It's already been dealt with, already been taken. I have a bit of a confession to make. A couple of months ago, I was visiting someone in at Richmond Hospital, and I misread a parking sign and got hit with a parking fine.

I thought I'd parked correctly, so much so that I actually rang up the fines department of the council and complained, and they pointed out that, no, no, they've got evidence. Go back and check.

I went back and checked, and they were right. I had sinned. And so the fines department had every right to demand I pay the fine, my judgment.

[19:17] But imagine if the mayor of the council stepped in and paid my fine for me. I said imagine. No wishful thinking. And if he did that, then the fines department no longer had any power to demand that I pay it, did they?

The mayor had already paid it for me in full. And with Jesus, this is not wishful thinking. He did step into our world at Christmastime to grow up and pay for our sins at Easter time, to take our judgment in full so that Satan can no longer demand it.

His power to demand our judgment or eternal death is broken. This is the first way that Jesus saves us from Satan's power.

And it ought to bring us great tidings of comfort and joy. Oughtn't it? But the second way he saves us from Satan's power is to undo what Satan did.

Satan led us away from God into sin and spiritual death. But by paying for our sins, Jesus brings us back to God and spiritual life. And so on the next slide, we read in 1 Peter 3 that Christ died for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God.

[20 : 40] Or on the next slide, in Ephesians 2, we keep reading and we see there that because of God's great love for us, he is rich in mercy, he made us alive, spiritually alive with Christ, even though we were once dead in transgression.

See, Satan led us away from God into sin and spiritual death, but because of God's great love, he gave his only son to pay for our sins and bring us back to God and spiritual life, to restore our life with God, just like Jesus restored that man's life.

Now, remember, dressed, sitting in his right mind? Well, now, our life is restored spiritually with God so that we can have a mind that knows God rightly as our Heavenly Father.

We can have a mind that knows how to live rightly as his precious children, with contentment and joy, and even have help to resist Satan's ongoing deceptions and temptations.

And what's more, this restored spiritual life now comes with a guarantee of a restored physical life later, which we'll look at more next week.

[21 : 53] But you see, this is how Jesus saves us from Satan's power when we had gone astray. He steps into our world at Christmastime to grow up and pay for our sins at Easter time so that we need no longer fear death and judgment, but can instead be forgiven and restored to life with God.

That is, if we trust in Jesus. And so do you? Or are you more like the townspeople who just say, go away, I don't want any change in my life, I don't want to risk suffering any loss.

Do you trust in Jesus, believe in him? Have you prayed to God something like, I believe you gave your son to save me from my sins, help me to follow him as my king?

It's as simple as that. And for those of us who have done that in our lives at some point, then we are to do what the man wanted to do, that is stay with Jesus, follow him, and did do, go and tell all that the Lord has done for us.

We are to follow Jesus as our king and take the opportunities to share with others what he's done for us. Whether it's by inviting them to a Christmas event later this year, or simply sharing with them that you're not worried about something because you're praying to God, whatever it is.

[23 : 23] Let me finish with a true story that happened in May this year. Two French nationals, along with a South Korean woman, were on safari in Africa at a safari park when they were kidnapped by terrorists and taken to Burkina Faso.

The French government actually sent in 20 commandos to rescue them. Two of them are on the next slide. It's Cedric on the left and Alan on the right.

They actually died in the process of rescuing these French nationals. And at a press conference on the next slide, the nationals, together with the South Korean lady, told of all these soldiers did for them in saving them from what they called hell.

In fact, one of the headline articles on the next slide says hostages rescued from Burkina Faso hell, inverted commas, because that's what they called it. And the rescued people praise the fallen French commandos.

Jesus is not a fallen French commando, for he has risen. But he did die to save us from Satan's power, from an actual hell, that our life might be restored with God.

[24 : 40] And so how much more ought we to tell and praise him for what he's done for us? As the words, the last hymn, last verse of our next carol, which is God rest you merry gentlemen, says to all, to the Lord sing praises every person in this place.

So how about I pray and let's then do that. Let's pray. Our gracious heavenly father, we do thank you for the arrival of King Jesus at Christmas, that he entered our world and to die for us and save us from Satan's power when we had gone astray.

Help us, in light of what he has done for us, to follow him as our king and the tell of all he has done for us.

We ask these things in his name. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.