

Amazing Deliverance

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[0 : 0 0] Demons. Do you believe in the existence of demons? I guess if you reflect on our 21st century sophisticated society, you'd agree that there are those who scornfully reject any idea of the existence of demons.

But in this so-called sophisticated society, there's intense interest, in fact, in the supernatural. Examples, Ouija boards are common.

Some heavy metal music is just saturated with references to the spirit world. Horoscopes and astrological predictions are virtually in every newspaper and magazine that you pick up.

And seeking to communicate with the dead seems to just now be nearly commonplace. Hillary Clinton, when she was in the White House, had a particular interest in Eleanor Roosevelt, who was, of course, the wife of a former US president.

And according to the award-winning journalist Bob Woodward, who's been in the news recently, in the first month of the Clinton presidency, Hillary apparently often turned to Eleanor Roosevelt for inspiration, holding imaginary discussions with her.

[1 : 1 6] And then, of course, on TV and at the movies, the occult is becoming a big money spinner. Sometimes, of course, the occult is packaged up in nice little bows with sweet young girls.

An example of that would be the series known as Charmed. But, of course, there's a more sinister visual impact in movies like The Exorcist.

And we'll just show the front of that rather than some of the horrifying publicity shots in it. And just in the next couple of months coming up, there's going to be just even more macabre offerings that are going to hit the theatre screens.

Some of those are going to include great little delights like The Eye, Dead Birds, and then, of course, the daddy of them all, Satan's little helper.

So, across our screens, across the country, this is really just becoming increasingly commonplace. Many of you will know that C.S. Lewis wrote that famous and provocative little book called The Screwtape Letters.

[2 : 2 7] And in his introduction to that book, C.S. Lewis gives this wise view, if you like, of two errors that people can fall into. He says, what happens on the one hand, people either disbelieve that demons exist, or on the other hand, they believe that demons exist, but they have an unhealthy and excessive interest in the demonic.

In Mark chapter 4, Jesus instructs the disciples to go to the other side of the Sea of Galilee.

And while they're crossing the sea, they encounter this fierce storm. And Mark records that Jesus rebuked the wind and said to the sea, Peace, be still.

And the wind ceased and there was dead calm. And of course, for the Jews, the sea was an image of chaos, indeed of evil. And Jesus is displaying his power over life-threatening forces.

And so it's no wonder at the end of that chapter that Mark records that the disciples were filled with great awe. And they said to one another, Who is this that even the wind and the sea obey him?

[3 : 37] Who indeed is it? Who do you say that Jesus is? So when we come to the description of the demonic at the beginning of Mark chapter 5, we see that the disciples arrive on this other side of the Sea of Galilee in a region known as the Gerasenes.

And that area would have been a pagan, predominantly a Gentile area. It had a Greek culture and it was occupied by the Romans. And in fact, that east side of the Sea of Galilee, the land rises up steeply to the Golan Heights.

And today, of course, the Golan Heights are still disputed territory. And it's likely that the disciples arrived at night. It's fair to say that that was probably a pretty eerie experience for them.

The disciples would have already been quite uptight after experiencing that frightening storm. And so Jesus steps out of the boat. And as he steps out, he's confronted by what appears to be a madman.

Of course, the man is in fact demonized. And he's demonized with an unclean spirit. And the man runs towards Jesus. And this is really a pathetic, in many ways, a heart-rending story.

[4 : 52] The man lives amongst the tombs, we're told. The tomb's a place of death. Death. So imagine the scene. The man's home is the unclean place of the dead.

But he himself is the home to unclean spirits. And then look in the text how the man is described. Because the man's description is classic of someone who's demonized.

He has superhuman strength. The residents of the town had obviously tried to tie him down, to chain him, to tie him up like an animal. But there was nothing that could constrain him.

He was uncontrollable. He was dangerous. The man howled. Maybe you could think of the howl of a wolf. Day and night.

The man inflicted damage on himself by beating his arms with stones. Obviously trying to drive those evil spirits out. What a picture of destruction that is, if you can visualize something of that in your mind.

[5 : 53] Humanity disfigured. The undoctored face of evil. The undoctored face of evil. Death. Destruction. Isolation.

Tortured mind. Catch the significance of that. The demonic function is to distort. In fact, it is to destroy the image of God in man.

And of course, those under the sway of demons typically descend into filthy living, whether that's physically or whether it's morally. And I think if you reflect on our society as we look at the increase in drug abuse, pornography, obscenity, we shouldn't be surprised by the rise that we see in the occult and also in Satanism.

In the US, for example, it's estimated that there are over 200,000 registered witches and many, many more unregistered. In the world, the estimate is something like 8 million.

In Germany, there are more fortune tellers that are registered than pastors. But to keep a perspective, not all demonization is so blatantly gross as the description in Mark 5.

[7 : 05] God tells us through the Apostle Paul in 2 Corinthians 11 that Satan also masquerades as an angel of light. So demonized men and women can actually appear pretty conventional.

Well, Mark goes on in verses 6 to 12 and he speaks of the response of the unclean spirits. When the demoniac saw Jesus at a distance, he runs and he falls down at his feet.

So think of this animalized type person, this filthy person, probably this bleeding person. But his falling at the feet of Jesus is not an act of worship.

It's an acknowledgement of Jesus' superiority. Because it's Jesus' holy presence that triggers like a catalyst reaction from the unholy.

And the demonized man shouts at the top of his voice. And in the early chapters of Mark's gospel, we see, in fact, that that's the pattern. In chapter 1, there's an unclean spirit in a person in a synagogue and cries out, What do you have to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth?

[8 : 13] Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are, the Holy One of God. And now, here's Jesus in Gentile country. And he's confronting the demonic world.

Come out of the man, you unclean spirit, Jesus commands. And the man with the unclean spirit shouts at the top of his voice, What have you to do with me, Jesus, son of the Most High God?

I adjure you by God. Do not torment me. And it's interesting that that title, the Most High God, is typical of a Gentile description of deity.

The demon knew clearly that the demonized man was standing before Jesus Christ, the son of the Most High God.

It's interesting that, in fact, when the demonic world is confronted by Jesus, they always recognize who he is. And contrast that simply with the city that we live in. Because you'll probably know lots of men and women who go out of their way to deny the deity of Jesus.

[9 : 23] In fact, just this week I was at my regular Pilates session, but after the problem in putting the apron on, I probably won't do a glute stretch for you. And this is very small up here. But in this Pilates session, one of the ladies in the group was waxing lyrical about the Da Vinci Code to the instructor.

And she went on with all of the hype of your typical sort of literary critic. And then she declared, There's lots of things in the book that I'm not sure about, but I am certain of this. Jesus is not the Christ.

He was a great man. He was a great prophet. But definitely not the Christ. She was up the other end of the room and I was in straps and all sorts of funny shapes. I couldn't get to her to ask the question, Had she ever read Mark chapter 5?

Paul says in 2 Corinthians 4 that Satan has blinded the minds of unbelievers to stop them from seeing the light of the glory of the gospel of Christ.

Now John Lennon, even some probably under 30 years of age, might even remember the name John Lennon. Well in his relatively short life, he made a number of pronouncements, just blasphemous statements about Jesus Christ.

[10 : 35] Stunning statements. As I looked through some of those transcripts in the last week, ones that I'm not going to repeat for you. But it's against the background of those sort of statements by John Lennon that I don't think it's surprising that Lennon himself recounted experiences with the occult.

And his experiences are recorded in what's known as the last Lennon tapes. John Lennon said, My joy is when you're like possessed, like a medium, you know.

I'll be sitting around, I can't do a liverpudling accent, but it'll come in the middle of the night or at the time and you don't want it to. That's the exciting part. I don't know who wrote it. I'm just sitting here. The whole song comes out.

So, well, you're like you're driven and you find yourself over at the piano or guitar and you put it down because it's been given to you or whatever it is that you tune into. John Lennon consistently through his life denied the deity of Jesus Christ.

Was he right? Who do you say that Jesus is? And what's the basis of your answer? Well, the demonized man declares his name to be Legion.

[11 : 45] And that's the first indication in the text that more than one demon is involved because Legion, in fact, was a military term which described a detachment of, say, 6,000 Roman soldiers.

So is there significance in that name? Well, clearly it tells us that this man was massively afflicted by the demonic world. And it certainly conveys that Jesus is engaged in a major battle.

There is a host of demons. But as we see, Jesus is certainly not outmatched. And the demons beg Jesus not to leave the country.

Look particularly at verse 10. Because that begging posture of the demons clearly shows the superiority of Jesus. And in fact, in Luke's gospel, in the parallel account of this miracle, it indicates that the demons were desperately seeking to avoid being sent to what's known as the abyss, a place of confinement.

And they plead with Jesus, send us to that large herd of pigs, about 2,000 of these pigs. That is, anything would be better than going to the abyss. And they asked to go to the pigs and they asked Jesus because they recognised Jesus' authority.

[13 : 05] And the presence of the demons in the herd, what happens to the pigs? Well, it throws them into panic. They run over the edge of the steep bank down into the water and they're drowned.

And I want to suggest that that's a powerful illustration of the real impact of the demonic presence and influence. Because the real impact is destruction, degradation and death.

So we come to verse 13. And verse 13 is just, in many ways, climactic in the text. We could summarise that whole verse maybe just in four words.

Christ, the sovereign deliverer. What was it that Jesus did? He gave the demons permission. Catch the significance of what's happening here.

There was a man with unclean spirits who'd been a slave and now he was delivered from demonisation. There was a man with unclean spirits who was wild, who was uncontrollable.

[14 : 09] And now he's delivered and he's sitting quietly at Jesus' feet. The man with unclean spirits had been the instrument of satanic opposition against the Messiah. And now he's a witness to Jesus' power and mercy.

This man who'd once been a menace to society, what is he now? He's a messenger with words of deliverance and healing. It's important also, I think, to note, especially given some currency in the modern church, to note that Jesus doesn't drive out the demons by applying some special formula or some particular ritual.

It's the power of the person of Jesus Christ alone that drives the demons out. Who is this Jesus then that the wind and sea obey him?

Who is this Jesus that demons obey him? Who do you say that Jesus is? And the text then concludes with two responses to this extraordinary miracle of deliverance.

The word about what happened spread quickly. Verse 14, the swine herds ran off. They told it in the city and in the country. Then people came to see what had happened. And they came to Jesus and they saw the demoniac sitting there, clothed and in his right mind, the very man who had had the legion.

[15 : 39] I mean, you might expect, given all of that, that there would just be fantastic celebrations in the town, wouldn't you? I mean, what an extraordinary act of deliverance by this Jesus.

Celebrations? Absolutely no way. What the residents do is they beg Jesus to leave. And it sort of leaves the question in mind, well, why would they beg him to leave?

And there's some interesting suggestions in the commentaries, but I think the text is pretty clear. Look at the end of verse 15. The residents of the town, they were afraid.

You see, they'd begun to realise that there was one who was far more awesome, far more to be feared than legion. This had been an undeniable miracle.

Clearly, the only explanation was God. The residents, of course, they'd worked out how to deal with legion. They'd forced him out of their presence. And now they wanted Jesus out too.

[16 : 37] They didn't want anything to do with Jesus' awesome power. It was an awesome power over which the residents of the town had no control. It's ironic, isn't it, that the demons didn't want to leave that part of the world.

And the residents didn't want the Messiah to stay. And yet, before these people, before their very eyes, they saw this extraordinary transformation.

Here was the man. He was sitting. He wasn't roaming around. He was clothed instead of naked. He was self-controlled. He was of a sound mind. And such transformation is simply impossible, isn't it?

Impossible. Impossible except for God. Jesus grants the request of the residents.

And if you think about that, that is an unbelievably extraordinary and short-sighted choice of the people in that region. I mean, who did they think that this deliverer was?

[17 : 45] Who do you say that Jesus is? And Mark concludes the account with the response of the man in verses 18 to 20.

Because as Jesus goes to get into the boat, this delivered demoniac pleads with him. Pleads with him to stay. Notice this stunning reversal.

The man who absolutely feared the arrival of Jesus now dreads Jesus' departure. It's a fantastic reversal.

It's a fantastic reversal. And Jesus commissions the man to do what? To return to his own people and declare to them what God has done. See, it's interesting.

The gospel writer Mark simply has, if you like, an equivalent sign between Jesus and the Lord. That is, when Jesus acts, it's God who's acting.

[18 : 39] And so this man who was once treated like a wild animal, he's now transformed. And in fact, this man, if you think about it, he's actually the forerunner of the gospel mission to the Gentiles.

He's the forerunner of Paul the Apostle. So this man who's freed from the bondage of the devil becomes a messenger.

He's commissioned to take the good news. The good news of an almighty deliverer of the Lord Jesus Christ. A deliverer of news, the best news of salvation and deliverance.

So what's your response to this extraordinary miracle? This amazing miracle? What's your response to the great deliverer?

I wonder if your response is like the residence, because that was pretty simple. It was simply, get lost. Or is your response really like that of the delivered demoniac?

[19 : 39] Worship and service of the Lord Jesus Christ. But, I don't know, maybe I'm speaking to someone tonight who's sitting there saying, but I don't know what the relevance of this is to me. I mean, I'm not demon possessed.

In fact, I've never even seen anyone who's been demon possessed. I think the reality is we often struggle with texts that talk about demons because we're so used to dealing simply with a physical world.

But have a look at the world then that we live in. Because whether it's at a personal level, whether it's at a family level, certainly at an international level, we see horrific, destructive actions.

And how could anyone honestly look at all of that and not conclude that there is diabolical evil in the world? And the Bible just again and again and again presents this very black and white antithetical picture.

You'll know it well. There's a narrow road that leads to eternal life. There's a broad road that leads down to destruction. There's a kingdom of darkness.

[20 : 45] But there's a kingdom of God's beloved Son, Jesus Christ. And in fact, when Paul talks about the transfer from the kingdom of darkness to the kingdom of God, do you know how he describes it?

He in fact describes it as a rescue. He describes it as deliverance. And the Bible says if we're outside of a personal relationship with Jesus Christ, then we're in this state.

And there's a variety of ways that this state is described in Scripture. These are just some of them. We're described as being in the kingdom of darkness. We're described as being followers of the ruler of the power of the air.

Satan, the spirit that is at work in those who are disobedient. We're described as being slaves to sin. Now that's not saying that in that unbelieving state we're all equally evil.

But it is saying we're all cut off from a holy God because of our sin. So unbelieving men and women, they don't always run around. In fact, typically they don't run around, carry on, rant and rave like the demoniac in this region on the east side of the Sea of Galilee.

[21 : 54] But nevertheless, they're still under Satan's control. And it's into this bleak, dying, dehumanized kingdom of darkness.

It's into that sort of kingdom that the glory of the gospel penetrates. And it penetrates, the way I see it in mind, is like a laser beam slicing through it.

Jesus says, anyone who hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and doesn't come under judgment, but has passed from death to life.

Who do you say that Jesus is? I mean, who do you say that the proclaimer of those words is? There isn't any fulfillment, true fulfillment, and there's certainly no true freedom outside of a personal relationship with Christ.

Christ who is the great deliverer. The kingdom of darkness is simply that. It is dark. And I want to press that on you tonight because it can be, in all sorts of ways, made to appear different.

[23 : 03] There can be nice little girls on a shot. There can be bows to make it more attractive. There can be artificial lights that shine on it, giving it the illusion that it actually has life.

In the world, the kingdom of darkness is marketed in a whole variety of ways to make it appear not dark. But the reality is that the kingdom of darkness is dark, it's degradation, and it's death.

So, if I'm speaking to someone tonight who's outside of that personal relationship with Jesus Christ, let me encourage you strongly, don't be like the residents of that town.

They were afraid to get too close to Jesus. Push him away. They didn't want divine accountability. But divine accountability can't be avoided. And if you are in that state, let me encourage you tonight, this night, to turn to the great deliverer, the Lord Jesus Christ.

Because it was in God the Father's great love that he sent the Son into this world of darkness and degradation on this extraordinary rescue mission to deliver us.

[24 : 14] And God promises that by his Holy Spirit, he'll regenerate us if we turn to the Lord Jesus in repentant faith. And for many I know who I speak to tonight, you've made that turn on the Lord Jesus Christ is indeed your Savior and Lord.

Let this passage in Mark 5 fill you with just wonderful confidence, not in yourself, but in the extraordinary, absolute sovereignty and power of the Lord Jesus Christ.

And be like the delivered man. Be like the delivered man who simply wants to go and share that good news, not only to his family, but also to that surrounding region.

Be like the delivered man who is the Lord Jesus Christ.