

Dehumanizing, Rehumanizing

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Date: 04 November 2012

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- [0 : 00] Let's pray. Lord Jesus, we pray that you would open our ears to hear your word tonight.
- We pray this in the name of Jesus. Amen. Well, folks, we got a fairly riveting passage here tonight, don't we? Kind of a crazy story, something like straight out of Michael Jackson's movie, The Thriller.
- You know, you've seen that? You can just keep that image in your mind. Some of you haven't seen that, and I don't advise you to do it, but it is fairly close. It seems to me that Aaron Roberts thinks it's fun to give me these incredibly crazy passages.
- So it's like, man, look at this crazy passage with all the demons. You know, email to Ryan immediately, right? So anyways, but I'm happy to do it. I'm happy to do it. It's going to be a good one.
- We weren't in the book of Mark last week, but the week before we were, and we covered the story, maybe you remember it, about Jesus calming the storm. Remember the story?
- [1 : 07] Jesus is out on the water with his disciples in a boat, and the storm comes up, and it's obviously a life-threatening storm, or these folks who were like fishermen who knew the water, who knew the waves, they wouldn't have been freaking out.
- So this is a life-threatening storm. Jesus is out there with his disciples, and the Bible says that Jesus is taking a nap. So the disciples are freaking out because this storm is nutty, and Jesus is taking a nap, and so they wake him up.
- They say, Jesus, listen, we're going to die out here. The storm is nuts, and you're taking a nap. Like, do something about it. I don't know what they expected him to do, but Jesus stands up, and he speaks to the wind and the waves.
- He says, peace be still, and all of a sudden the storm dies down. The interesting thing about this passage is that right at the end there, it says that the disciples were still afraid.
- So they're afraid from the wind and the waves. Jesus calms the wind and the waves. Peace be still, and they're still afraid. Why are they still afraid? What is Mark trying to get us to see here?
- [2 : 17] Well, I think he's trying to get us to see that the disciples were, like, freaked out about this guy that was in their boat. Because I think they had categories that they had squished Jesus into.
- They had the category of, like, nice religious leader, rabbi, good teacher, maybe possibly even, you know, political leader. But the only one who can still the seas and calm the seas is Yahweh.
- So Jesus stands up, and he speaks to the wind and the waves, and the sea calms. The only one who does that is Yahweh. And so the disciples are struggling with their categories.
- They're looking at this guy going, I thought he was a rabbi, but he's doing things that only Yahweh does. They've got a categorical confliction here. And so at the end of this passage, they're afraid, and it ends by saying, who is this?

Who is this that even the wind and the waves obey him? And I think that that statement, who is this, is actually framing what's going on here in our passage.

[3 : 27] I think that's what this passage is attempting to answer. This is the statement that we need to keep in our minds. As I'm going through this passage tonight, you need to keep in the back of your minds, the backdrop for it is, who is this?

The story that we're going to hear tonight, the story we're going to go through, is attempting to answer this question. So let's dive into the text. In verses 1 to 5, Jesus comes out of the sea, and he comes onto the shore, and it says that he's met there by a man with an unclean spirit.

Now in the English, and without kind of looking at the structure of this passage, you look at this word met, and it sounds like this guy showed up with milk and cookies and was looking to have a nice little chat with Jesus.

But really, this term, this idea here, actually lends itself to like hostility. So when it says that this man came out to meet Jesus, immediately from the beginning, Mark is trying to show us that this is going to be a hostile encounter.

This is going to be a power encounter. Whatever is about to happen, there's something serious about to go down. Next thing we need to pay attention to is how vividly Mark describes this man who's oppressed by the demons.

[4 : 54] Look what the text says. It says that he lived among the tombs, and no one could bind him anymore, not even with a chain, for he'd been bound with chains, but he wrenched the chain apart, and he broke the shackles to pieces.

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

Mark doesn't, typically, Mark doesn't take a lot of words to say something and describe something unless he needs to, unless you're supposed to really look at something. And Mark takes some time here to point our attention to the state of this man.

There's a few things I think we're really supposed to see from this particular text. Number one, Mark tells us that this demon-possessed man came from out of the tombs.

He came from out of the tombs to meet Jesus. In Mark's language here, you almost get this picture like the tombs are like some sort of womb that are like birthing this demon-possessed, decrepit, dehumanized individual.

[6 : 17] You get this dark picture of this dark womb pushing this man out to meet Jesus. What are the tombs? What are the tombs?

The tombs, this isn't a trick question, by the way. The tombs are the place of the dead. The place of the dead. So this man's home, his residence, the place where he resided, the place that held him was the place of death.

So without saying it in so many words, Mark is saying that this man is a living dead man. He's a living dead man.

I think this is a beautifully robust picture of the gravity and hopelessness of this man's condition. Mark goes into great detail using this beautiful, wonderful image of the tombs to describe this living dead man.

Secondly, twice in this passage, the text emphasizes that no one could subdue him. No one could bring him under control.

[7 : 27] No one could bind him up. So the evil that torments this man is not fixable or controllable by any human means.

Humanly, the evil that possessed him was not going to be controlled. There was no strategy to work your way out of it.

This is beyond human control. Thirdly, Mark draws our eyes to the result of this demon possession. It says this.

It says that he was crying out and cutting himself with stones. The evil that was within this man was destroying him from the inside out.

We're let in on the fact that if this man does not deal with this evil or if there's not some sort of intervention in dealing with this evil, this is going to bring about the total destruction of his being.

[8 : 28] So what is Mark trying to communicate through his vivid description of this man? What are we supposed to see? Let's summarize what he's told us so far.

He's told us about a living dead man that is possessed by evil that is beyond human ability to fix.

He's possessed by an evil that if not dealt with, it's going to destroy him. A living dead man possessed by evil beyond human ability to fix that if it's not dealt with, it's going to destroy him.

In my estimation, I think that Mark is intending us to see this man not as just a nice individual occurrence or a random episode in the life of Jesus, but Mark is using this to show us the state of humanity without Christ.

A humanity that has been victimized by the forces of evil. A humanity that is functionally the living dead. The living dead.

[9 : 37] A humanity that will be destroyed by the evil that is within it if there's no intervention on its behalf. You know, there's something in us, I think, that would like to look objectively at this story.

But I think if we're going to read this story faithfully, it is really important that you're not looking objectively at the man, but rather you're looking through the eyes of this man to see your own condition.

To see your own condition under sin before Christ. You know, there's some in this service tonight who have been rescued from evil. You've been rescued from your sin.

You've been rescued from death. You've received his intervention in your life. There's others in this room tonight who have not received Christ's intervention.

It may be that you think, when you look at your life, that you're okay. And I'd like to humbly submit to you, because I know this is hard to take, but I'd like to humbly submit to you that maybe you've misassessed the power of sin and evil in your own life.

[10 : 50] The Bible talks about the fact that evil has permeated everything. Sin has permeated everything. And without some sort of intervention, we are just like this man.

Hopeless, bound, hopeless to be bound by anything other than Jesus. It's beyond human control. The sin that ravages us is not gonna be something that we can work our way out of.

It's not something that we can just be good enough and fix it on our own. This passage also does something else for our definition of sin. I think it rounds it out a little bit, because we talk lots, because I think the Bible emphasizes this, but we talk lots about sin being rebellion against God.

You know, sin isn't just rebellion against God. And God doesn't just hate sin because it's rebellion against Him. God hates sin because it destroys that thing that He loves.

above all else. It destroys humanity. Why should we hate sin? We should hate sin because it destroys humanity.

[12 : 09] As we look at this man, we see a man who is bound by evil, being destroyed by sin. We see an evil that was leading him into and holding him in the place of destruction and death.

You know, one of the reasons, or one of the horrible things about sin is that it's kind of like, we kind of enjoy it for the most part, right?

It's kind of like the easy way to live. The trouble is, is that it's, it's like, have you ever, have you ever seen those commercials with those Gatorade sports drink things?

Or, not necessarily Gatorade, but you know those rehydrating sports drinks? You know, where there's like some like chiseled dude with his shirt off, it's like playing soccer without a jersey for some reason, and he comes into the, comes into the bench and he pounds back this huge thing of Gatorade and the sweat strip, maybe I shouldn't be so visual, but anyways, you know, you know what I'm talking about, right?

Those rehydrating drinks. Well, you know, there's been studies done recently that are arguing that actually some of those rehydrating drinks actually produce the opposite effect.

[13 : 21] And when you drink them or when you pound them back, actually they, they're dehydrating your body. It seems to me this is, whether this is true or not, because I haven't verified it, but whether it's true or not, it's a great picture of sin.

It's something that we, we take into ourselves thinking that it's gonna fix some sort of need. When actually, when we're taking it into us, it's actually destroying us from the inside out.

It's actually dehydrating us instead of rehydrating us. So for those of you who maybe are here tonight and you have not had Christ intervene in your life and rescue you from sin, let me just ask you, is it possible that the sin that you're embracing is actually dehumanizing you, not making you more human?

I'll leave that with you to answer yourself. Anyways, back to this story. This man is incredibly bound by evil and he's in need of rescue. He is hopeless.

And the question that sits in the mind of the original hearers is, would Jesus, who's meeting this man on the shore, would Jesus have the authority to deal with the evil that no human being could deal with?

[14 : 35] Was he going to be able to bring this man from the place of death into life? Maybe it's, maybe that's a question you're even asking tonight. Is there a solution to the evil in our world?

Is there a solution to the evil that pervades my family situation? Is there a situation for the evil that is destroying my marriage? Is there a situation for the evil that's destroying my life?

I'll let you sit with that for a second too. So in verse 6 to 13 on this backdrop, Mark begins to recount this confrontation between Jesus and this man with the unclean spirit.

In verse 6 it says, the demons say to Christ, because Christ had been working on them. There must have been some sort of process and I'm not here to get into five steps on how to deliver your friend from demons, okay?

I'm going to try to stick to what this narrative is doing which is not to give us tips on how to cast a demon out of our neighbors, even if you think that they need it. But this is not what this text is saying.

[15 : 41] This demon says to Christ, he says, what do you have to do with me, Jesus Christ, son of the most high God? He calls him by name. Then he says, I adjure you by God, do not torment me.

So what's going on in this little chunk? Well, in the ancient world, there is lots of, there's lots of situations where somebody is having a demon cast and the exorcist would use the name of the demon to gain control over that demon.

I don't know why that helped, but this is what they did. And so we, probably, what we probably have here is Mark using a very ancient way of understanding this to show us how this demon was attempting to gain control over Christ.

It's interesting that the demon says, I adjure you by God. Obviously, by using this title, Jesus Christ, son of the most high God, he was sort of missing something if he's still using, trying to bind him by God.

But it seems that he's trying to take control of this demon. It's clear to most scholars that this is what's going on here today. By the way, I love saying it's clear to most scholars.

[17 : 00] It makes me feel so safe. What do we have going on here? Well, there's a conflict between Christ and the powers of evil and evil is attempting to get the upper hand.

Evil is attempting to gain control over Christ. So in this confrontation, in this power encounter, what we see is the demon sort of taking a swing at Christ.

So then what happens? Well, what happens in the narrative is Jesus then begins to tell the demon that he's got to give him his name. The text tells us then that Jesus asks for the Spirit's name and it's interesting to me that the Spirit can't resist but he has to concede.

This little encounter, what we're supposed to see is that evil, that the evil that could not be contained by chains or by shackles was now being harnessed by the words of Christ.

The other thing that's really important to notice in this little passage is the name of these spirits. Jesus asked the name that the demons say, we're called legion for we are many.

[18 : 22] What is legion? Well, a legion was a term used to describe, you know, somewhere around 6,000 foot soldiers. What is not happening in this passage is Mark is not trying to tell us exactly how many demons are inside this man.

That's a distraction from what Mark is actually trying to do which is he's trying to use this term to say army. What's inside this man?

An army of evil. So what are we supposed to see? We're supposed to see Jesus in a power encounter with an army of evil. An army of evil that nobody could subdue, that no chains could pull down, bring down.

We're supposed to see that simply by speaking though that Christ binds these powers of evil. No chains, no shackles, just a word.

Then what does he do next? Well, he casts the demons into the pigs. Now this is a point in the passage that we could go on some serious bunny rabbit trails.

[19 : 27] There's all kinds of stuff. If you've ever looked into this text, even while you heard it being read, there's all kinds of really peculiar questions you would like to ask. And for the sake of the passage and trying to be faithful to our time limit, I am not going to go into all of the reasons why Jesus may have casted the demons into the pigs.

But what is clear is that he casts this army into a herd of pigs which were not herd-like animals, and this army of demons causes these pigs to rush down or maybe Jesus pushes them, he sends them rushing down into the sea and they're drowned.

I understand, yes, that you have all kinds of questions there, but what I think is crucial to be aware of in this text is how a first-century Palestinian Jew would have heard this story.

What would they have been thinking as they heard about an army of evil cast into the sea and drowned? If you were a Jew, you had your mind, your whole psyche shaped by stories of God's interactions with his people.

You celebrated, your life revolved around celebrations and festivals that recounted the way that God dealt with his people. One of those stories and one of those things that was highly celebrated, obviously, in the Jewish tradition is the story of the Exodus.

[21 : 00] You remember that story? Where Jesus, or where Yahweh leads his people out from under slavery, bondage. There's an army chasing them.

He leads them through the water and then when Pharaoh's army gets into the water, those seas come over and they're drowned in the water. You remember that story?

I think it would be really hard if you were a little first century Palestinian Jewish man listening to Jesus this day. I think it would be really hard to miss what's going on here.

You see, by painting this sort of picture, this army that's been driven into the sea and drowned, what I think Mark is doing is he's identifying the person of Jesus.

What he's trying to do, what he's trying to scream through the text of his gospel, he's trying to scream, Jesus is Yahweh. Jesus is God.

[22 : 02] So much like the calming of the sea episode, Mark is again identifying through a story that would have been deeply embedded inside the Jewish psyche.

He's trying to illustrate who Jesus was. He was Yahweh. So in verses 1-5 we're left questioning whether Jesus would have the authority to overcome the evil that's destroying this human being.

And the answer to that question so far is that Jesus is the one who destroyed the armies of Pharaoh and rescued his people before. He is Yahweh.

He's that same God and he's going to destroy evil by doing it again. The beautiful part about this story is not this not the miraculous kind of like extravagant power encounter between Jesus and these evil forces.

The crazy beautiful part of this story is what it talks about next. It talks about the posture of this man. It says that people came from all over the place because the herdsmen are a little freaked out.

[23 : 19] A friend of mine Alistair Stern who some of you know was saying telling us one day that these herdsmen probably lost \$750,000 worth of pigs that day.

That's a fairly significant natural disaster. But anyway so these guys are a little freaked out. This is a serious power encounter and they run off into the cities and the countryside and people come screaming back to see this man that they've probably heard of by rumor.

They've heard of this crazy guy that lives in the tombs the place of death and so they all come to see and what do they see when they get there? They see a man sitting there clothed in his right mind.

Folks this is the climax of the story. Why is this the climax of the story? Because it's kind of the end of a movement in this passage.

A movement that begun with death. A movement that begun with bondage. That slowly moved into a power encounter between Jesus Christ and the forces of evil.

[24 : 26] Yahweh and the forces of evil. And now on the other side we have a man who had previously been dehumanized had now had his humanity restored and he's sitting there in his right mind.

What we have here folks is a picture of resurrection. We have a picture of the resurrection power of Jesus Christ. Now I grew up in sort of a charismatic Pentecostal environment and that is the point in the sermon when every Pentecostal in the room would be standing on their pew shouting amens at me.

That is exactly where it would have happened but I understand here you know what we're Anglicans let's just shout amen in our spirits tonight.

You just do a real inner hallelujah amen okay. Whoa. Can I get a witness?

No I'm just this is a movement from death to life from death to resurrection from hopelessness and bondage to hope and freedom all made possible because of Christ.

[25 : 37] Friends this is the picture of the Christian hope. We believe listen to me Christian whether you're a Christian or not tonight listen to this we believe unswervingly that what Jesus Christ did through the cross and the resurrection conquered the power of evil and that evil now has a shelf life.

The Christian hope says that one day the evil that is tried to destroy and wreak havoc on humanity will itself be destroyed. There's a beautiful little passage from Revelation chapter 21 and in the passage it's talking about the new heavens and the new earth and in there it talks about there'll be no more crying there'll be no more tears no more pain.

One of the interesting things is that it says that there'll be no more sea in the new world. Okay so this is sort of a land paradise.

Well this I think this is a very Jewish way of speaking of evil. Let me unpack that just a tad and then I'll quit. You see for the Jews for us the sea is like man put on a bathing suit and go down by the sea and enjoy our life get a sun tan.

And you know for the average first century Palestinian Jew that the sea the waters were like terrifying. You probably knew someone who was a fisherman that had been killed by the sea.

[27 : 07] As a fisherman when you went out to the sea this was not like put on some sun tan lotion and have a nice day. This is like pray for my life. See the sea was like a symbol of evil.

And so in Revelation 21 where it says that there will be no more seas is a beautiful Jewish way of saying that evil is going to be once and for all destroyed.

What would that even look like? What would that look like in your life? Man, we probably should just take about 15 minutes which we're not going to do.

We should take 15 minutes to let our imaginations go a little bit wild on that thought. So to answer the question anyways that we began with, what is this passage trying to tell us about Christ?

It's trying to tell us that Jesus is Yahweh, the one who frees humanity from the bondage of sin and death by destroying the power of evil.

[28 : 16] Tonight there are folks here from many backgrounds. Some of you are Christians, Christians, you know, I hope this text reminds you of what a great thing you have been delivered of.

I hope this reminds you of the mercy of Christ towards us. Some of you are not potentially Christians in here tonight and you may at times feel absolutely overwhelmed by your own sin.

sin. There's something I would love for you to hear tonight. It's that your sin is no match for Christ. Your sin is no match for Christ.

And if you're here tonight and you are not somebody who has previously given yourself to Jesus, can I implore you to throw yourself trustingly into the arms of Jesus who's conquered evil on our behalf.

Amen.