

Whom the Son sets free

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[0 : 0 0] So a few years ago now, well actually a few years ago, I went travelling in my mid-twenties to Southeast Asia. I was in a few different countries out there, majority of the time.

I was in Vietnam for a bit and I think it was, well I say I think, I can't remember which city it was in, but I think it was Hanoi. And I happened to come, by chance, I was walking through a big park there, and I happened to come across one of the city zoos.

Now I love zoos, I love animals, we have a membership at Edinburgh Zoo, but the zoo in Hanoi is nothing like Edinburgh Zoo. It's not the kind of zoo that you walk around thinking, oh look at these animals, I'm so happy that they're well looked after and protected.

Because it's not the kind of conditions you want to see animals in. And my lasting memory, my lasting memory of that place is the lions. The enclosure is minuscule, the lions are skinny.

And you don't know, I don't know, I'm not an expert at what a miserable lion looks like, but they look miserable to me.

[1 : 1 4] Behind bars, it's a far cry from what you expect of a lion, you know, in a safari park. I don't know what the nearest safari park around here is, or if you're out in the wild.

But wild animals, when you see them like that, there's something sort of upsetting, isn't there? It's wrong, that's not how a lion is supposed to live out its days. It should be free to be like a lion, to roam.

And if lions had a purpose, you know that this isn't it. You know this isn't it. And I say that about lions. But I wonder, do we perhaps feel the same way when it comes to people?

You know, those who end up detained at Her Majesty's pleasure. Now we know, don't we, we know, that prisons exist to keep society safe, and so in a sense it's good and right that we have them.

But when you know, when you see that, we know that people weren't made to be imprisoned. It's a punishment. It's a punishment. And it really connects with what's going on in this passage this morning.

[2 : 1 8] Because in this passage this morning, we meet something similar. We meet a man who's imprisoned. He's not behind bars, but he's captive.

He's captive to sin, and he's captive to demonic evil. And as you read, and you read this man's story, you do, the question really comes to us, what does it mean to be free?

What does it mean to be free? Or perhaps the reverse question, what does it mean to be in captivity? What does it mean to be in captivity? The reality is that whilst this man is at the most extreme end of what it means to be captive, he's at the extreme end of what it means to be captive to sin and evil, it is alarming.

This story is alarming. And as we read that, we think, oh, this guy is way far gone. He's nothing like the situation that other people find themselves in.

And there's a degree of truth to that. But the actual reality, it pushes us, and it should be alarming to us, because everyone, every person actually needs to be set free from the same thing, sin and evil.

- [3 : 35] Free to live as God intended us to. So my hope and prayer for us, my hope and prayer for us is that God actually does set some of us free today. Maybe some of us, for the first time, or maybe from patterns in our life that we've not actually realised that are still keeping us in some way captive.

And we'll explore what I mean by that as we go through. To do that, we're going to look with different characters that come up in the story. We'll look at each character at a time as they come kind of chronologically in the story.

Look at the captive, unclean man, the unclean spirit, the captive crowd, and then the free, redeemed man. First of all, just a reminder of where we're at.

It's a while since we were in Mark's Gospel. The chapter that we're looking at, it actually follows in directly from the events before, in chapter 4.

You remember the end of chapter 4? You can look with me now, it's just before it. Jesus calms the storm on the lake. You remember that. And chapter 5, verse 1, follows on straight away.

- [4 : 49] You see that they went across the lake to the region of the Gerasenes. The storm had happened in the middle of the night. He calmed the storm with a word.

And upon landing on the shore, this is what Jesus is met with. Verse 2, when Jesus got out of the boat, a man with an impure spirit came from the tombs to meet him.

And this is the first character in the story. The main character really is the captive, unclean man. And surprisingly in Mark's Gospel, there's a lot of detail actually describing this man and his situation.

We know verse 2. He has an impure spirit we read. We know verse 2. It says he comes from the tombs. And in verse 3, he lives in the tombs.

Essentially, he lives with the dead. I mean, is there a more bleak picture than that one? He lives with the dead. Verse 3 and 4.

- [5 : 53] We know there's been issues with him and the local village or town. It says they tried to bind him with chains. It looks like they may have succeeded at one point.

But due to his immense strength, it's not possible anymore. He bursts them free. And the Greek actually explains what this man is like.

Has the intimation that he's like a wild animal that can't be tamed. That is what he's like. And my first thoughts are, what has happened in this man's life?

What has happened in this man's life for him to end up in this state? Like this. Verse 5 suggests that it's not the life he wants either.

Whilst he's unsafe in normal society and banished to the dead, we see he's mentally tormented. Night and day.

- [6 : 53] Verse 5. Night and day among the tombs and in the hills, he would cry out and cut himself with stones. He's literally groaning, groaning to be set free.

And you can't help but feel for him. What a terrible existence. He's by far, by far, the most wretched, pitiful man Jesus encounters.

I mean, that besides, he couldn't be more of an outcast. One, he's not Jewish. He's tormented by real evil.

He lives with the dead. He groans and wants to be free. What a terrible existence.

What a terrible existence. And yet, despite his situation, when he talks to Jesus, what he says is, is that, it comes across slightly confusing.

[7 : 55] What we see is that, actually, it appears that whilst he wants to be free, he's cutting and crying, there's part of him that doesn't want to let go as well. Because it's not clear when he speaks, whether it's the man speaking, the demon speaking, or a combination of both.

See, he falls in front of Jesus, and he says to Jesus, I think it's in, is it verse 10? No, slightly earlier. In verse 7, he says, after saying, what do you want with me, Jesus, son of the most high God?

He says, in God's name, don't torture me. Don't torture me. What does he think of Jesus? Have the demons been lying to him? We don't know. Verse 10, he begged Jesus again, not to send the demons, them, not to send them out of the area.

He begs Jesus, don't send the demons away. There's this, there's this kind of tension within this man's existence, that he, he wants to be free. He's groaning.

And yet, in some way, he doesn't want to let go. He groans, cries, cries, clucks himself, wants to free it, but at the same time says, don't torture me, Jesus.

[9 : 17] Don't send them out of the area. Perhaps, perhaps, and, I'm speculating here, perhaps it's been so long, that he, he fears what real freedom will be like for him.

Perhaps. And he struggles to let go, fears the change, that Jesus will bring. What we have, is an extreme picture, of the, of the dilemma, everybody, everybody goes through, and it's extreme, of what it means to be free.

And this is actually true, whether you follow Jesus or not. Now, if you're still, looking into the Christian faith, and what it means to, follow Jesus, perhaps there is, perhaps we know, there is the appeal of following him, of all the good things, the, the blessings, the, things that Christians talk about, of peace, and joy, and freedom, from the destructive life choices, that we've made.

But at the same time, perhaps there's the niggle, the fear. What if the things, that you enjoy, are taken away? There's always that niggle, isn't there?

You both, want the things, that Christians, seem, that enjoy, but there's the, the fear. Because sin gives temporary pleasure.

[10 : 36] In the moment, sin, in the moment when you're sinning, it feels good. And, and one of the problems, particularly, in our age that we live in, is one of the mantras of our modern age, is, if it feels right, do it.

If it feels right, do it. Do whatever you need to be happy. If it feels right, do it. Our feelings are promoted, as the primary decision makers. Because, now what I'm, hear me out, what I'm not saying, is that we should all be stoic, and just ignore, every feeling and emotion.

But as a general rule, as a society, we're not in danger of that. What we're really in danger of, is being captive, to our emotions and feelings.

We know that ourselves, anger, bitterness, fear, jealousy, they are destructive, but in the moment, they can bring us temporary pleasure.

When we're wronged, we feel like we deserve to feel angry, and bitter, to get our own back. We feel justified, we feel right, we, we've been wronged. When those things take a hold of us, what happens is, we're unable to make rational decisions, and it's our feelings, that direct, our behaviour, and we're held captive, by our emotions.

[11 : 54] We're held captive, by them. We're not free, to live, as God would want us. Like this unclean man, we want to be free, from thinking like that, we know on some level, that it's wrong, but we're not sure, what life would be like, if we let go.

What would direct us instead? The question, the question, what do you want to be free of today? A destructive, negative thought pattern, and angry, emotional responses, when it just keeps bubbling over, impatiently.

Anxiety, stress, perhaps it's something else, I haven't even mentioned. What do you want to be free, of today? The next character, that we meet, is the unclean spirit.

Now, we might think, as modern, modern, Western people, that this level, of, spiritual evil, the stuff that we read, demons, it's the stuff of fairy tales, from a less, civilised, age, that we've moved beyond, all this kind of, stuff.

But in reality, we can't deny, the existence of evil. Everywhere on the news, you only have to pick up, a newspaper, to know that evil's real, and, there are some things, that just, can't be quantified.

[13 : 21] You can't do a test, you think of even, even, even good things. You can't do a test, that defines good things, like beauty, or love. You can't do a, you can't do that, you can't do a test for that.

But, neither can you do a test, that defines what is evil. But you can point things out, that are evil. You think of that, it's actually very hard to, finish the, if you were to finish the sentence, evil is, dot, dot, dot.

It's actually hard to say, what evil is. You can point it out, but you can't define it. Yet we can point out, what evil really is, and say, that is evil. The reason we can do that, is because there's a common thread, that goes through the heart, of every man, that is able to point out, goodness and love, but is also able to point out, wickedness, and evil, because it, because it's real, and it exists.

Spiritual evil exists. Demons and the devil, are real, but Jesus has authority, over them. He invades demonic territory, and reclaims it, for the kingdom of God. He crosses boundaries, to bring salvation, to those who need it, and he rescues this man, and destroys the demons.

Satan's kingdom, is crumbling. The house of evil, is being plundered. Now in Jewish society, the knowledge, of a name, would give some, the way it worked, if you knew someone's name, it would give someone, power over that person.

[14 : 50] And so at first, when we read it, it appears that the demon, has the upper hand, doesn't it? Because the demon, knows Jesus, calls him out. What do you want with me, Jesus, son of the most high God?

It's an attempt, by the demon, to intimidate him. We've got your number, Jesus. Jesus has to ask, the demon's name, in verse 9.

So it appears, that the demon, has the upper hand, but what, but little does he know, the demon, calls himself legion, in a reference, to a Roman legion army. There's more than, one of them here.

And as we've mentioned, before, the man, begs Jesus, but then what we know, is the demons, beg Jesus, in verse 12. Send us among the pigs, allow us to go into them.

He gives them permission, and upon entering, to the pigs, the pigs panic, they're rushing, to the sea, and both, are destroyed. It's like, coming back, to the illustration, it's like someone, has sneaked in, to the zoo, that I travelled in, put the lion, on a plane, and rescued him, releasing him, into the wild, to be free.

[16 : 02] Like a bird of prey, that has, been injured, and been, but has not been allowed, to fly, not living, the life that's intended, had its wing fixed, and then released, and soars off, free to live, as God intended.

Jesus has authority, over sin and evil. Evil, has to beg, to Jesus. The demons, can't move one inch, not one inch, until he gives permission.

It is a picture, of how much power, Jesus has, over what you want, to be set free from. Destructive thought patterns, a physical addiction, anger, impatience, anxiety, whatever it is, Jesus is in total control, and power, and he's able, to set you free, as easy as he sets, this man free, so that you'll soar.

And notice with me, notice, notice with me, how this man, never actually asks, to be set free himself. Jesus initiates it.

Jesus initiates, this rescue. He lands, on the shore, and asks to be set free. How much more, for those of us, who know Christ, will he set you free, if you ask him?

[17 : 32] He actually tells Jesus, don't send them away. But Jesus does, what the man needs. And what do we read? He's found by the crowd, sitting, dressed, and in his right mind.

He's not crying, or cutting himself, but he's dressed. When Jesus sets you free, he puts you, in your right mind. Your mind is free, to think, and live, and make decisions, and be wise, and live, as God intended you to.

How do you want, to be set free, by Jesus today? He's able, he's able to make you, soar, and reach heights, you never thought, possible. Third, group, is the crowd.

The crowd, the captive crowd, the crowd, are afraid of Jesus. Which is quite remarkable, isn't it? We see what happens, verse 14, it says those, tending the pigs, the herdsman, we might call them, they run off, and report, what has happened, and the people go out to sea, and the reaction, is surprising.

When you first read this, you're expecting, amazement, at what Jesus has done. Or perhaps, amazement, you might expect, expect them, to be frightened, by what's happened, to the pigs.

[18 : 57] But neither is the case. Verse 15, when they came to Jesus, they saw the man, who'd been possessed, by the legion of demons, sitting there, dressed in his right mind, and they were afraid.

What is so scary, about seeing someone, sat at the feet of Jesus? Set free.

It appears, doesn't it, it appears, that they were more comfortable, with forces of evil, than the one, who can rid the reason, of such evil. It appears that way.

More comfortable, with evil, than with Jesus. They're afraid of him. The status quo, has been disrupted. When evil was there, perhaps, there was a sense, that they knew where it was, and where it stayed, and an illusion of control.

The demons, and the man, were, it's okay, they're over there, in the tombs. We, they don't bother us. And have you noticed, how every character, up till now, that speaks to Jesus, begs him?

[20 : 00] The man, begs Jesus, not to torment him. And he doesn't torment the man, he sets him free. The demons, begged, not to be sent away, and he sends them, into the pigs. And here, the crowd, beg Jesus to leave.

And he goes. They chase off, the source of deliverance. They fear the one, who has authority, over evil.

If he's got that much power, is he to be trusted? They could, they could, they could, compartmentalise the demon, possessed, guy, crazy guy.

Now what? People are afraid, of what they can't control, and they certainly, can't control Jesus, or the effect, Jesus has, on people. To hit to them, he's an unknown quantity.

I don't know, if you've ever, I'm guessing, most of you, have had that, occasion, where you're driving, in icy weather, and you hit a little bit of ice, and even if it's just, for a split second, you notice, part of the wheel, begins to go.

[21 : 05] Or maybe for a couple of seconds. And for a moment, when you're, when the wheels, begin to go, even if you get control, for that moment, your heart's in your mouth. You're not in control, of the car.

And you don't know, what's going to happen. Am I going to end up, the other side of the road? And then you get control, and it's back. You're okay again. That's how the crowd feels, with Jesus.

It's like Jesus, has taken hold, of their steering wheel. They're not in control, of how things are going to go. They don't know, what Jesus, is capable of. And so they want him, to be as far away, as possible, to feel in control, of their life, of their village, of their community, again.

The reality is, and, it's a hard one this, because what it, what it means is, that when Jesus, sets people free, it will not always, bring joy, to those who, find, the transformed person.

Because people, fear change, and fear that, change that Jesus, brings. People actually, more content, when, to be, people more content, when there's, sin around.

[22 : 17] and, and, they're content, to isolate those, who seem unlovable, and a lost cause. When, Jesus sets people free, it can cause others, to fear that, perhaps their relationship, with that person, will change, because of what's going on, inside that person, they're new.

The crowd's relationship, with this man, will never be the same, again. He, he actually leaves, the tombs, doesn't he, to live a life, following Jesus. And, people in your life, whilst they notice, that you have changed, may want the old you back.

Wasn't it better, when, you just, all got together, and, did whatever? Wasn't it better, when, you didn't confront them, and speak up, against things, that aren't right?

Not everyone, likes the change, that Jesus brings, and that is hard. That is hard. Because it changes, it, it, it does change, the relationships, that we have, for those who haven't, been changed.

Finally, let's look at the, we come back, to the demon, possessed man, but he's not demon, possessed, so we'll give him a new name. Come for the, redeemed man, or the, the free man.

[23 : 36] Verse 15, we read again, the man is dressed, he's sitting, and he's in his right mind, and we see, yet again, the fourth example, of someone begging, Jesus.

Verse 18, as Jesus is getting, into the boat, the man who had been, demon possessed, begged, to go with him. But what's surprising, is this is the one, we expect Jesus to answer, and he doesn't, he says no.

Verse 19, he doesn't let him. Jesus has bigger plans, for this man. Go home to your own people, and tell them, 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 him, the Decapolis, how much Jesus, had done for him, and all the people, were amazed. The Decapolis, is a huge region, of Palestine, it incorporates 10 cities, and it's across, this huge region, that people here, and know, what Jesus has done.

That Jesus the Lord, has set this man free. You imagine his family, you imagine this man's family. Surely, they'd cast him out of their minds, tried to forget about, the black sheep of the family, and all the bad choices he'd made, and where he'd ended up.

[24 : 50] And can you imagine the day, he says go and see, when he knocks on the door, and his family, open the door, to this man, who's been totally tormented, lost, they open the door, and his right mind, changed, totally changed, a different man.

And he says, I'm here to tell you, what the Lord has done for me. That, that, he came to me, and all my mental, torment, has gone.

All the stress, all the things I've done, he's set me free from. He's had mercy on my soul, and I'm forever changed. And he, I wanted to go with him, but he said, I should come and tell you first, to let you see me, to let you see, who I was, and who I am now.

Can you imagine that day, when he went to his family? Incredible. Throughout the region, his family, the whole of the Decapolis, they're amazed.

The crowd wanted rid of Jesus, but this doesn't mean that this man's testimony, doesn't have impact. They're amazed, seeing him talking, interacting, speaking of the encounter, telling them about Jesus' rescue, how he sets people free.

[26 : 13] That is true for each of you, and me. Jesus has changed each one of us. It scares some, but it amazes others.

People can't believe that you're the same person. It scares some, it amazes others. Because how you've been changed, actually is the witness, it's actually one of the witness, that Jesus is real.

The evidence that Jesus is alive, and that he's still working today, is how you have changed. That is the witness, that is the miracle. It's the miracle of, the most amazing thing that Jesus can do is, is to set somebody free from their old life, to live a new life, where they look like Jesus Christ, in the way that they do, and the way that they've been changed.

You, each of us, can have the same impact, on the people that we know, just like this man does. What other explanation is there, than Jesus must be real.

And he must be powerful, to do this. And so as we come in for landing, I want you to remember this.

[27 : 35] Remember it was Jesus, who took the initiative, to set this man free. Remember it was Jesus, that took the initiative, in your life, to set you free. There is a hymn, where I realised this week, that the words are wrong.

It says, I've decided to follow Jesus. You might remember, I've decided to follow Jesus. That's not right, isn't it? It's, I didn't want to follow Jesus.

I didn't want to follow Jesus. I didn't want to follow Jesus, but he set me free. No turning back. What do you want Jesus, to set you free from, today?

Free from comparison, comparing yourself, to everyone else. Free from anxiety, free from worrying, about your reputation, free from your emotions, by being controlled, by anger, or impatience.

God can set you free. He takes the initiative. There'll be some, who'll struggle, as God changes you, and want you, to hold you back, who liked it, better when you made them, feel more comfortable, about sinning.

[28 : 48] But there'll be, some will be amazed, at what God has done, in your life, to whom the Son, sets free, is free indeed, from all sin, from all evil, and from death itself.

The cross, the blood of Christ, shed for you, brings change, sets you free. We have a wonderful gospel, we have wonderful good news.

Let's pray. Almighty God, we thank you, for the wonderful good news, that sets us free, to be the people, that you created us to be.

We know that in our lives, that there are many things, that still keep us captive. There are many things, that we would long, to be free from, and yet even, whether we've known you, for five minutes, or whether we've been Christians, for 30 years, you know, those areas of our heart, where we still don't know, what it would mean for us, to let go, and let you free us, to soar.

And so we ask, that you would, take the initiative, that you would come now, and that you would set us free, that you would, that you would change us, so that where there is, anger and impatience, there'd be peace, and humility, and love, where there's, anxiety, and stress, and worry, that you'd help us, and change us, to be, free of those things.

[30 : 25] We know that, they might not go away, straight away, but we, we give those things, over to you, and ask that you'd minister to us, in those moments in our life, day by day, making us more like your son, and we look forward, to the day, when we'd be completely free.

We look forward, to the day, when nothing of this sinful world, will have any, of the curse, will be, have any hold over us, anymore. We praise you, for your son.

We praise you, for the gospel. And we pray, that our lives, would witness, to the, to a dying world. We pray, that you would, amaze others, with the testimony, of how we've been changed.

We ask, that you'd, remember this word, to our hearts, that you would change us, here this morning, in Jesus name. Amen.