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Introduction

The story is told of the Rev A. J. Gordon who at the start of the last century was the pastor of a Church in Boston. One day he met a young boy in front of the Church carrying a rusty cage in which several birds fluttered nervously. Gordon inquired, "Son, where did you get those birds?" The boy replied, "I trapped them out in the field." "What are you going to do with them?" "I'm going to play with them, and then I guess I'll just feed them to an old cat we have at home."

When Gordon offered to buy them, the lad exclaimed, "Mister, you don't want them, they're just little old wild birds and can't sing very well." Gordon replied, "I'll give you \$2 for the cage and the birds." "Okay, it's a deal, but you're making a bad bargain."

The exchange was made and the boy went away whistling, happy with his shiny coins. Gordon walked around to the back of the Church property, opened the door of the small wire coop, and let the struggling creatures soar into the blue.

The next Sunday he took the empty cage into the pulpit and used it to illustrate his sermon about Christ's coming to seek and to save the lost—paying for them with His own precious blood. "That boy told me the birds were not songsters," said Gordon, "but when I released them and they winged their way heavenward, it seemed to me they were singing, '*Redeemed, redeemed, redeemed!*'"

Now I don't know about you, but I love hearing stories of those who have been redeemed. It warms my heart to be reminded "*that we were once lost, but now found, was blind but now can see*". It motivates me. It challenges me. It prompts me to action. So today I want us to look again at Legion, to see the difference that Christ makes in our lives. So let's turn again to Mark 5 and when we do we see a man

1. Chained. Chained

In fact we see a horrible picture of what evil can do to a man who is demon possessed. A man who lives not among the living but among the dead. A man who has at one time been chained, but he is so strong he has been able to break those chains and now he wanders around alone, night and day, crying and mutilating himself with stones. It's a terrible scene. And he is a pitiful creature.

Now we don't know much about who he was, but we do know that he was somebody's son. He was someone's relative. He was probably somebody's husband. He might have been somebody's Dad. But he definitely was created by God for a relationship with others and a relationship with God himself.

Yet when Jesus first sees him he is incapable of any type of relationship at all. At

some time he must have opened himself up to the Devil and the Devil has come in and made his heart, his home. And he has bit by bit destroyed his life.

Now, you may never have seen anyone demon possessed anytime in your life, but although it is not particularly common nowadays it still happens today in Australia. And many missionaries who travel overseas where cultures are less Christianised witness the incredible destruction of this sort of behaviour in people's lives.

But here in front of Jesus is someone whose life has been chained. Someone where we can see clearly the effects of what evil can do. And friends these sort of effects are not just there for those who are physically possessed by the Devil. You see a similarly destructive attitude in the lives of those who are chained by drugs or alcohol. Evil can destroy a life when it is given completely over to the love of money, when it becomes chained to the workplace, or we are imprisoned by our own love of self. The symptoms may not be quite as severe in these cases, but these things drive us away from others, squeeze the life out of us and fill us with pain and tears.

And yet, even this man is not without hope. For when he meets Jesus he goes from chained to changed. And we see quite clearly what *Jesus* can do.

2. Changed.

For this man, runs up to Jesus and falls down on his knees in front of him. He recognises Jesus authority as being the Son of the Most High God. And he opens himself up to the power of God so much so that after Jesus speaks the word, there he is, no longer naked, but clothed. No longer mad, but in his right mind. No longer possessed but free. From chained to changed.

And the difference is due to Jesus coming into his life. Jesus has power over the evil spirits, even when there is a legion of them, some 2,000 to 6,000 worth of them living in the man. Jesus has power over the physical world, he can direct these spirits to go into a herd of pigs feeding near by. Jesus has power over human beings, he can release the captive, he can give sight to the blind, he can free those who are chained.

But this incident doesn't just show us Jesus power, but also his mercy and compassion. Jesus cares about this man. In fact when you look closely at this passage, we see the only reason why Jesus is there is because of this man. You see he has crossed over the Lake to this region and immediately after he arrives, he changes this man. But the locals hearing the story of what Jesus has done to the demoniac tell him to go away and Jesus does what they say. So he travels all this way for just one man. But this one man needed salvation and that is exactly what he got.

I suppose this just reminds us that all people are important to God. God's desire is that all might be saved. Even those who seem beyond help. Even those who have made a complete hash of their lives can be changed. No one is too far away from God. Jesus Christ is so powerful that evil can do its worst, and yet it still is at the beck and call of the Almighty God.

And that's why I think we have that strange situation where the evil spirits plead to go into the pigs. They cannot do whatever they want to do. They too are under the Lord's

control. But the thing that most of us find strange is that Jesus would give them what they want, rather than just destroying them outright. But Jesus listens to the request of the demons and as one man has put it, *“And so the herd of ham hotfooted it. The pork pounded the pasture, but the swine couldn’t swim, so the Sea of Galilee quickly became the Bay of Pigs! Soon, there remained little but bacon on the beach.”*

So why does Jesus do that? Was it to show those present in a visual way the destructive power of the devil, how he just wants to cause chaos and death? Was it to prove that Jesus really had healed this man? Was it to allow the destructive influences of the demons to vent their full fury but on an animal rather than on a human? We’ll probably never know but it does highlight both Jesus power and his compassion. How this man goes from being chained to changed because of the mercy of Jesus.

A man went into a Church one day because his wife finally persuaded him to come. But he was a man who had a drinking problem, as well as a gambling problem. And as he looked around at all the other well dressed, seemingly problem-free people, he felt mightily uncomfortable, so unlike those around him, that he almost left.

But while he was thinking of leaving, the service began, and he was trapped. The minister stepped to the pulpit and a bit later on read the Scripture for the day. It was found in 1 Corinthians 6:9-10, *“Do you not know that the wicked will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor male prostitutes nor homosexual offenders. nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God.”*

The man thought to himself, “Well, I guess that leaves me out.” But then the minister went on to read the next verse, verse 11, *“And that is what some of you were. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.”*

And then the minister did an unusual thing: He looked over his congregation & said, “As I read (again) this list of sins, I wonder if you would stand as a testimony of God’s deliverance in your life. When I read the sin God has delivered you from would you just stand?” And he began, “Sexually immoral.” Not much movement. “Idolaters,” one or two stood, “Adulterers,” a long pause, then a brave soul, then another.

And on he went through the list until at the end, almost the whole Church was standing. The man looked around and said to himself, “Well, maybe I do belong here after all.” You see, the message that man heard that day was that although we are full of failure and frailty, because of Christ we can be full of forgiveness and deliverance. Christ can change you and set you free. Chained. Changed and Charged. Charged. For the passage ends with the emphasis on what *we* can do.

3. Charged.

For when Legion is changed, he begs to go with Jesus. This man had changed his life, this man had turned it all around. He wanted nothing better than to stay close to him all of his days, to learn from him, to be with him. And instead Jesus says, “Go!, Go.”

For the Christian life is not one of just staying close, it is a matter of getting up and going. Go. Don't just stay here. Don't just put your feet up and relax. You have a part to play, you have a task to perform, you have a responsibility to discharge.

"Go home, to your family." For the place to start is where you live. With those in your family. With your sons & daughters, your grandkids, your partner, your relatives. That is your ultimate responsibility. That is the context that God has placed you in. That is the testing ground to see if your faith really works, to see if those who really know you can see the changes. To see if you can put into practice what you preach.

And this seems to be a general principle in Scripture. For at the end of the Luke's gospel, Jesus is again telling his disciples of their need to reach out with their faith but he says *"This is what is written: The Christ will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, and repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem."*

It starts with your home, your home town, with the people you rub shoulders with every day. With the people who can see if there has been a difference in your life. As Author, Dwight Ozard once said, *"The greatest mission field we face is not in some faraway land. It's barely across the street. The culture most lost to the gospel is our own - our children and our neighbours."*

And friends that should be our priority. Our first priority is God, then our family, then our Church, lastly ourselves. It is our family, that we love the most. But they are also the hardest to talk to as well, aren't they? We have more to lose, if they reject our message. We hold inside of us the scars of the past. Or the guilt of past slackness. Or the embarrassment of wrong motives, wrong methods, and a lack of compassion and care in how we went about our task.

But despite the difficulties and pitfalls the place to start in reaching out with the gospel is still our family. We all have family members who are not Christians, or who are not living out their faith or growing in their faith. And so Jesus word to Legion, is his word to us as well I believe. To pray for opportunities. To think through the best approach. So those who are chained by the world all around us might be changed.

Go. Go home to your family. And tell them how much the Lord has done for you. We're not to tell them about the Five Point of Calvinism. We're not primarily there to get into deep theological debates, we are to tell others what has happened to us. We are to share our own story, something that no one else can do as well as us. We are to point them to Jesus the one who has changed us with the gospel of God's grace.

Now can I point out that when Jesus told Legion to do this, he had only just become a Christian. He didn't have any training. He attended no seminars or workshops on evangelism. He had read no books on how to share his faith. And yet he is charged with a responsibility. Jesus uses this person, unprepared and unworthy. But Jesus tells him to go and tell his family what God has done for him.

Which is all he requires of us. Not to know all the answers to people's questions. Not to know how the Trinity works. Not to know the Bible from cover to cover. But if we have been changed, we are charged. If we have experienced God's grace, God's

mercy, God's forgiveness, then we are to be ready to share those things with others.

And so what did Legion do? He was obedient. He went at once. He began to tell people what Jesus had done for him. And the people were amazed. You see those who had tended their pigs had seen Jesus great power, they had witnessed an incredible miracle yet they had decided to send him away. But they respond to the witness of an ordinary man, an ex demoniac. So much so that next time Jesus goes into this region in Mark 7, there is considerable interest in his message where here there is none.

God doesn't normally use the miraculous, he uses everyday people like you and me. God doesn't write a message in the sky, he gives his Church a message to tell. God doesn't just use just the talented, the well know speaker, the evangelist, he uses us. And he says if I have made a difference in your life, then you have something to tell others. Which probably means the flip side is also true, if we have no desire to tell anyone about Jesus, it may be because there is nothing to tell.

As one preacher has put it "*God is in the people saving business, and His method is to use his people.*" But we might go home and share Jesus with the people in our neighbourhood, but the call of the gospel is not just to your home town, but eventually to the whole world. Jesus last command to his followers before he headed up to heaven was "*go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.*"

Not just to Tweed Heads, not just to Australia, but to the whole world. Yes we start with our own home and family, but we can't end with our own home and family. Yes there are Australians who are chained and lost and far away from God, but there are Iraqi's as well. There are Chinese. There are Italians. There are Sudanese.

And so at the same time as we reach out at home, we need to support people who are reaching out overseas. We need to pray for Nicole Linkalter in Chad. We need to write letters of encouragement to Nerida Bell in Japan. We need to financially support the Lillies in South Asia. How are the people of the world to hear about Jesus unless we send missionaries to teach them? How are they going to know about God unless they can read the word of God in their own language? How are they going to grow strong in the faith without Churches that will nurture them, disciple them, train them?

Now you can't support every missionary activity, but you can take an interest in two or three. They are willing to go to places that you aren't willing or able to go to, so wont you stand by them with your prayers? They have to cope with a different county, a different culture, a different language. How hard would that be if those who send them aren't willing to support them in their difficulties? They are people just like us with the same hopes and fears, the same highs and lows, the same family issues and the same worries. And yet they have removed themselves from their home Church, their friends, their family, their homes in order to tell others about the saving gospel of the Lord Jesus. They represent both God and us, so lets make sure we don't forget about them. Let us ensure that as we are reaching out to our own local area, that we are supporting others reaching out to their local area as well. It is our responsible as a Church, those who were chained and then changed are the ones who are now charged.

Let me end with a story. There's a legend, a made up story that tells of the return of Jesus to heaven after his time on earth. The angel Gabriel approaches him and says "Master you must have suffered terribly for people down there." "I did" replies Jesus.

And do they now know all about how you loved them and what you did for them?
"Oh no" said Jesus. "Not yet. Right now, only a handful of people in Palestine know."

Gabriel looked worried, "then what have you done", he asked, "to let all people know of your love for them?"

Well I have asked Peter, James, John and a few others to tell people about me. Those who are told will in turn tell others, and Gospel will be spread to the farthest reaches of the globe.

Gabriel frowned and looked sceptical. He knew that people weren't dependable. "Yes", he said, "but what if Peter and James and John grow weary? What if the people who come after them forget? And what if, way down in the 20th and 21st centuries, people get too busy to bother telling others about you. Haven't you made any other plans?"

"No, I've made no other plans, Gabriel," Jesus answered. "I'm counting on them."

Jesus is counting on us. Those who were chained, who have been changed are now charged. Those who know what evil can do, and have seen what Jesus can do are now reminded of what they can do. Go. Go home to your family and tell them how much God has done for you and how he has had mercy on you. And make sure that every home will one day hear the wonderful gospel of God's grace.