

TRUTH FOR TODAY

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FREEDOM FROM BONDAGE #4

Let's conclude our study of a miracle performed by Christ - the record of which is Mark chapter 5. This was an encounter between Jesus and two men demon possessed. Thus far we've noted what little we know about demon possession, a description of one of the poor men afflicted, and the mighty miracle Jesus performed to bring about the cure.

We're currently noting the results of Jesus' miracle, including the rapid spread of the news into the nearby town, the witness of the man, formerly demon-possessed but now Christ-possessed, the fear of the people and their request for Jesus to leave, and the cured man's longing to be with Christ. Jesus refused the man's desire for him to accompany Him and told him to remain at home, knowing the man could teach his own family and in that way be a blessing to them and others in this predominantly Gentile region. The cured man did exactly that:

"And he departed, and began to publish in Decapolis how great things Jesus had done for him: and all men did marvel" (Mark 5:20). One can only imagine what a great preacher this man must have been! And, is he not an example for each of us? Do we tell others the great things Jesus has done for us in providing forgiveness of sins and the hope of salvation through His spotless sacrifice? Is that not part of our mission in the church?

An Application For Us

Though actual demon possession as per this text does not occur today, we can still be in bondage to Satan in much more subtle ways. How can we defeat our adversary -- how can we become free from the bondage in which he has so many?

First, expect to do battle with the enemy. Satan has always been and will always be

our foe; he is indeed “public enemy number one.” Of him, Paul warns that we are not to be “*ignorant of his devices*” (2 Corinthians 2:11). To defeat the enemy, we must know the enemy -- his strategy, his strengths, his weaknesses. The devil is deceptive, and makes sin appealing, alluring, and attractive. He is relentless, refuses to take “no” for an answer, and never gives up.

Second, while the war is raging, we must wear the armor of God (Ephesians 6:10-18). We can no more defeat Satan minus God than the demon-possessed man could expel the demon minus Christ. Try to tackle the devil on your own and you’ll lose every time!

Third, resist him (James 4:7). Only if we yield to him can he invade our lives and destroy our souls in the process. He is only as powerful in our lives as we let him be, and can’t destroy anyone’s soul without his consent.

Finally, remember that only the faithful are on the winning side.

Conclusion

We close with two final observations. **First, when that demon-possessed man encountered Christ, he underwent a radical transformation.** Is that not what happens to any honest truth seeker today? In fact, Paul says this of those who become God’s children: “*Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature*” (2 Corinthians 5:17). There is a difference in your life people can see!

Second, isn’t it ironic that the people, having seen the greatness of Christ -- His life, His work, His compassion -- wanted Him to leave, and wanted nothing to do with Him? Man hasn’t changed much in two thousand years, has he? We preach the life, the vicarious death and sacrifice Jesus made for us, as well as His offer of eternal life. What is the typical response? Most, like those Gadarenes of old, reject Him. This they do to the dismay of God and

to the detriment of their own souls.

What is your response? Are you in bondage to Satan? Are you in his grip of sin? Do you want to be free? Freedom can be yours, but only by the way of Christ Who said: *“And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free” (John 8:32).*

Wayne Cox

PROVOKE UNTO LOVE AND GOOD WORKS

Our text for the following thoughts comes from the wonderful book of Hebrews, where the inspired writer counsels his readers then and now:

“Let us hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering; (for he is faithful that promised;) And let us consider one another to provoke unto love and good works: Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching” (Hebrews 10:23-25).

The main emphasis in Hebrews was and is to prevent apostasy. It is difficult to see how anyone could read this letter and still believe in the doctrine of “impossibility of apostasy,” or better known as “once saved, always saved;” however, many do cling to such erroneous teaching, in spite of ample warnings in Scripture regarding such.

Hebrews was written to Jewish Christians who were in danger of abandoning Christianity. Judaism was a now obsolete system, having been abolished or taken away by Christ at the cross (*Colossians 2:14*). There was, however, very real pressure placed on these believers to revert back to it -- thus, the need for the Hebrew letter to encourage faithfulness to the system of salvation found in Christ.

One key word in Hebrews is “*better;*” it is used some thirteen times in this thirteen-chapter book. By use of this term, the writer lists a series of comparisons to indicate the superiority of Christianity over Judaism. With that in mind, one could outline Hebrews as follows: (1) Christ is Superior in Person (chapters 1 - 4); (2) Christ is Superior as our Priest (chapters 5 - 10); and (3) Christ is Superior in the Principles by Which He Guides Us (chapters 11 - 13).

Our text falls in the second section of the letter, emphasizing Jesus’ superiority as our priest. He is better than the earthly priesthood (chapter 5), better than the Old Covenant (chapters 6- 7), and better than those animal sacrifices and daily offerings (chapters 8 - 10). In chapter ten, further contrasts are drawn between Old Testament sacrifices and the sacrifice of Christ. First, the writer points out some limitations of the Law of Moses (verses 1 - 4), the most obvious of which was its failure to make men “*perfect*” (v.1) and to forgive sins, for “*...it is not possible that the blood of bulls and of goats should take away sins*” (v. 4). Since the Law could not forgive sin, why revert back to it?

Second, the writer observes some contrasts of Christ (verses 5 - 14). It is as if the author is saying, “I’ve told you what the Law couldn’t do, now let me tell you what Christ can do.” In contrast to offering animals for sacrifice, Jesus offered His own body voluntarily. When those animals were put to death under the Law, it was always against their will -- no bull or goat was a willing participant! In Jesus’ sacrifice, His will was involved -- a will that submitted obediently to God.

A third point of distinction was that Jesus made one offering, rather than many: “*But this man, after he had offered one sacrifice for sins for ever, sat down on the right hand of God....For*

by one offering he hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified” (Hebrews 10:12,14). Thus, when Jesus shouted from the cross, *“It is finished”*, it was! *“One sacrifice for all, offered up once for all, that there might be freedom for all.”* Because of such, there are precious and priceless benefits to the obedient believer (*Hebrews 10:15-18*), which include complete remission of sins and freedom from the guilt of sin. With Christ, we are free! But, such could never be said under the Mosaic Law. Thus, reverting back to the Law would be the equivalent of a freed man going back to the system of slavery - an utterly foolish thing to do!

With benefits often come responsibilities and privileges of the believer: *“Having therefore, brethren, boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus” (Hebrews 10:19).* Under the Old Testament system, the high priest went into God’s presence once a year. The veil in the temple in essence said to the people, *“Keep out!”* When Jesus died, that veil was torn in two, and by that act, Jesus symbolically said, *“Come in!”* His blood freed us from contamination, allowing us to enter God’s presence with *“boldness.”* We have confidence to approach God -- not because of who we are -- but because of what Christ did. Here is a wonderful privilege for every child of God!

Since Jesus is superior in every way: as a person, as our priest, and by His principles; since He offered His blood as a perfect sacrifice; since as a result, we enjoy remission of sins and freedom from the guilt of sin, there are three exhortations that follow, all beginning with *“let us”*: (1) *“let us draw near” (v. 22)*; (2) *“let us hold fast” (v. 23)*; and (3) *“let us consider one another” (v. 24)*. As we consider our topic, *“Provoke unto love and good works,”* we do so within the framework of these three verses and concepts. Here, three needs are mentioned: (1) the need for holding fast to the faith (*v. 23*); (2) the need for properly provoking each other (*v.*

24a); and (3) the need for love and good works (vv. 24b - 25).

THE NEED FOR HOLDING FAST TO THE FAITH

“Let us hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering: (for he is faithful that promised” (Hebrews 10:23).

What comes to mind when you think of “*holding fast*” to something? I think of that small tube of adhesive called “Super Glue”-- just one drop is powerful enough to hold fast two objects together, even your fingers if you’re not careful! It is as if the writer is saying, “Be a super-glue Christian -- be so glued to the faith that nothing can pry you loose!”

[continued next month]

Wayne Cox

WEBSITE

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GOSPEL MEETING

June 28 - 30, 2019

Mel Futrell, speaker

VERONA CHURCH OF CHRIST
