

Blackburn Baptist Church Virtual Service, 10 May 2020



Welcome

Greetings to you all on this Sunday of the May Bank Holiday weekend, as we commemorate the 75th anniversary of VE Day. We're still in 'lockdown' but free to 'open up' in the Spirit of the Risen Christ, ready to sing the praises of him *'who loved us and washed us from our sins in his blood, and has made us kings and priests to his God and Father, to him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.'* So our first hymn this morning extols the immense love that our Saviour God has for everyone us in Christ Jesus.

Song: *I Stand Amazed in the Presence*

(If you're online, click [here](#) to listen, or just read the words)

I stand amazed in the presence
Of Jesus the Nazarene
And wonder how he could love me
A sinner condemned, unclean

Refrain:

How marvellous, how wonderful
And my song will ever be
How marvellous, how wonderful
Is my Saviour's love for me

He took my sins and my sorrows
He made them his very own
He bore the burden to Calvary
And suffered and died alone

When with the ransomed in glory
His face I at last shall see
Twill be my joy through the ages
To sing of his love for me

Opening Prayer

O Lord our God, you are worthy of all our praise and adoration. Your love is indeed marvellous and wonderful; beyond our wildest dreams. You are the God who never fails to keep his promises. We thank you that in Jesus' life, death and resurrection we see your love and mercy, justice and victory fully displayed. You are the God who lifts up those who are weighed down. You are the God who provides for your children. Our desire is to praise you as long as we live. Inhabit our thoughts and feelings this morning, we pray. Though as your people we are separated by distance, because of the lockdown, may we be united in the joy and fulness of your Spirit. Through Jesus Christ our Lord, Amen.

Birthday Song: It's Bryony's birthday this coming Saturday.

Happy birthday to you!	Happy birthday to you;	Happy birthday to you,
Happy birthday to you!	Only one will not do;	From old friends and new,
Happy birthday dear Bryony.	Give your heart to the	May God bless you and
Happy birthday to you!	Saviour,	keep you:
	And then you'll have two!	Happy birthday to you!

Stuff for Little and Big Kids

(If you're online, watch the story video [here](#). Otherwise just read it below)

Song: *Nothing's Too Big Big Big for His Power*

(If you're online, click [here](#) to listen, or just read the words)

Nothing's too big, big, big for his power
Nothing's too little, little for his care
Nothing's too big, big, big for his power
Nothing's too iddly-widdly for his care
Nothing's too big, big, big for his power
Nothing's too incy-wincy for his care
Nothing's too big, big, big for his power
Nothing's too teeny-weeny for his care

He is God of the big, God of the little
God of the stuff somewhere in the middle
The King of moving mountains
Loves you more than you will ever know.

Nothing's too big, nothing's too small
Nothing's too much, he cares for it all!

"Nothing's Too Big Big Big for His Power" words & music by Doug Horley
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Bible Reading: *Mark 5.1-20*

They went across the lake to the region of the Gerasenes. When Jesus got out of the boat, a man with an impure spirit came from the tombs to meet him. This man lived in the tombs, and no one could bind him anymore, not even with a chain. For he had often been chained hand and foot, but he tore the chains apart and broke the irons on his feet. No one was strong enough to subdue him. Night and day among the tombs and in the hills, he would cry out and cut himself with stones.

When he saw Jesus from a distance, he ran and fell on his knees in front of him. He shouted at the top of his voice, "What do you want with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? In God's name don't torture me!" For Jesus had said to him, "Come out of this man, you impure spirit!" Then Jesus asked him, "What is your name?" "My name is Legion," he replied, "for we are many." And he begged Jesus again and again not to send them out of the area. A large herd of pigs was feeding on the nearby hillside. The demons begged Jesus, "Send us among the pigs; allow us to go into them." He gave them permission, and the impure spirits came out and went into the pigs. The herd, about two thousand in number, rushed down the steep bank into the lake and were drowned.

Those tending the pigs ran off and reported this in the town and countryside, and the people went out to see what had happened. When they came to Jesus, they saw the man who had been possessed by the legion of demons, sitting there, dressed and in his right mind; and they were afraid. Those who had seen it told the people what had happened to the demon-possessed man—and told about the pigs as well. Then the people began to plead with Jesus to leave their region.

As Jesus was getting into the boat, the man who had been demon-possessed begged to go with him. Jesus did not let him, but said, "Go home to your own people and tell them how much the Lord has done for you, and how he has had mercy on you." So the man went away and began to tell in the Decapolis how much Jesus had done for him. And all the people were amazed.

Song: *What a Faithful God*

(If you're online, click [here](#) to listen, or just read the words)

Oh Lord, I come before
Your throne of grace
I find rest in your presence,
And fulness of joy
In worship and wonder,
I behold your face
Singing what a faithful God have I

Refrain:

What a faithful God have I
What a faithful God
What a faithful God have I
Faithful in every way

Lord of mercy, you have heard my cry
Through the storm you're the beacon
My song in the night
In the shelter of your wings
Hear my heart's reply
Singing what a faithful God have I

Refrain

Lord, all sovereign
Granting peace from heaven
Let me comfort those who suffer
With the comfort You have given
And I will tell of Your great love
For as long as I live
Singing what a faithful God have I

Refrain

"What a faithful God" words & music by Dawn Critchley & Robert Critchley
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Message: *'The Miracle of Mob!'*

During these five weeks from the last Sunday in April to Pentecost Sunday at the end of May, our theme is the miracles of Jesus. The purpose of our study is to demonstrate the Lordship of Christ over all things in this world and the next. He truly rules OK! Nothing lies, or can lie, outside of his authority and power; there are no dangers or destructive forces that he cannot deal with or bring to nought. He is truly the Son of God. Therefore, we can trust him completely with our lives and with our deaths, for as the Apostle Paul could declare in Romans 8: nothing can *'separate us from the love of Christ....'* For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.' Wow. That is truly an incredible list of amazing grace! As Christians we can have, therefore, complete confidence that whatever happens to us in the future we can know, now and forever, perfect peace and rest, supreme shalom, in the everlasting arms of our Saviour God.

So this morning it is my joy to present another type of miracle, one that is often termed an Exorcism. And I've chosen the account of the Gesarene Demoniac from Mark's Gospel and chapter 5. I have three headings to help us grasp the full implications of this truly remarkable story.

It is a Story of Tragedy

In the previous chapter of Mark we are told that it was evening when Jesus and his disciples set sail across the Sea of Galilee. They were struck by a terrible storm, as if the Devil was doing everything he could to prevent them getting to the other side, but Jesus intervened to calm the wind and the waves. So it was nightfall by the time they arrived at the shoreline of the Decapolis region. And as they stepped off the boat they were greeted by a horrifying site: a ghastly figure of a tormented man running maniacally towards them, naked, covered with blood and a stench of death. He was possessed by demons, he lived among the tombs, and he was so strong that the locals could not bind or control him with chains. Such was his affliction and anguish that he was constantly crying out, howling at the moon, gashing and cutting himself with stones. What a pitiful picture we have here of a human life at its most desperate: a life in despair, utterly broken and seemingly beyond help and hope, separated from family and friends, and robbed of all dignity and decency.

Biblically speaking, 'demons' are unclean spirits or fallen angels, not ghosts or the spirits of departed souls. These angels were banished from heaven along with the Devil, formerly the Archangel Lucifer, for their rebellion against the authority of God (see Isaiah 14.12-17; Ezekiel 28.1-19). Yet, even though they are supernatural, they are still created beings; they are not omnipotent or omnipresent – they can't be everywhere at the same time. Equally, we sometimes speak of 'demons' as bad influences that can affect a person's mental well-being. We refer in this way to the harmful effects of drink and drug addiction. We also sometimes speak about a person's 'demons' when we talk about the awful pressures that they are under as a result of terrible or traumatic events in their past. It is as if they are under the control of external forces from which they struggle to escape. They live tormented lives. They have problems sleeping at night. So whatever we may think about demon-possession, the Bible clearly teaches that there are many different types of malign powers at work in our world, which seek to undermine the glory of human life, the truth of the Word of God, and indeed the fulness of our salvation in Christ. In his first letter, the Apostle Peter encouraged his readers to: *'Be alert and of sober mind. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour.'* As Christians we cannot be possessed by demonic spirits, because we have the Spirit of God indwelling us. But we can come under the influence of the Devil, as Jesus did in his Temptations; that is why we must keep our hearts and minds focused on Christ through his Spirit and through Scripture, which is how Jesus defeated Satan. Also, we must follow the advice given to us by Paul in the letter to the Ephesians: *'Put on the full armour of God, so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.'*

So why did Jesus bother to go to this region? After all, this was a Gentile territory on the eastern side of Galilee, quite separate from his Jewish

homeland. The country of the Gerasenes is made up of ten cities known as the Decapolis, a province that was founded by Pompey in 63BC as a beacon of Greek-Roman culture on the eastern frontier of the empire. Hence, on one side of the sea is the province of Galilee and all things Jewish, but on the opposite side, Jesus enters into the world of all things 'unclean' according to Jewish law. I can imagine the disciples thinking, 'Why on earth would a self-respecting Jewish rabbi, like Jesus, travel across the sea to this Gentile territory? Just getting out of the boat would make him unclean!' But Jesus breaks the Jewish rules and regulations in order to keep the true spirit of the Law of Moses. To Jesus, no one is so unclean, so far from God, that he or she is beyond the loving, redeeming, healing reach of the Spirit of God. Absolutely no one! So even before the demon-possessed man met Jesus, *the Lord was already on the way to transform his life, to rescue him from the clutches of the Evil One!*

Indeed, this theme of divine rescue is to be found throughout the Bible. In Luke 15, the Good Shepherd leaves the 99 safe sheep to go out on to the hills and look for the one that was lost. He sets out to look for the sheep, and keeps on looking until he finds it. Ephesians teaches that *'God chose us before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight.'* To be 'holy' and 'blameless' requires a transformation. If God chose us that long ago - before the creation of the world - he is not going to give up until he has accomplished his task in us! Are you reluctant to ask Jesus for a change in your life? Are you thinking: 'The problems in my life are too entrenched'? Or, 'I've always been like this. I'm used to it now.' The demon-possessed man didn't know to ask for Jesus' help, and probably didn't even know who Jesus was! How much more, then, will he come to us, his children, when we ask him to help us in our time of need? There may be storms on Jesus' way to us - storms that have to be quelled - but he has been coming to us since the foundation of the earth, so don't give up hope, and don't stop asking. As Jesus said to his disciples: *'For everyone who asks receives; the one who seeks finds; and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened. Which of you, if your son asks for bread, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a snake? If you, then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him!'*

It is a Story of Transformation

When the demon-possessed man saw Jesus from a distance, he ran up to him and fell at his feet. Then Jesus asks him, 'What is your name?' He said, 'My name is Legion for we are many.' 'Legion' is the term for a Roman regiment of 6,000 soldiers. This man was possessed by 6,000 demons, which gives you some idea of the extent of his diabolical condition. However, I much prefer the name given to him in the Good News Bible, which is 'Mob', for this word suggests a horde of unruly spirits, rampaging through this young man's life, hell-bent on his destruction, and no doubt they would have succeeded on their mission but for the grace of God and the love of Jesus.

It seems to me, however, that even though his personality was shattered into 6,000 pieces, there was still some small part of him that recognized his need of Jesus. He could have just hidden in the tombs, or the demons could have driven him away to another place. But instead, we are told he came to Jesus, because no doubt for the first time in his life he sensed a presence whose power was far greater than the demonic powers within him. And although the demons were godless spirits, they still recognised Jesus for who he really was: the Son of the Most High, the God of gods and the Lord of lords. Demons, like their leader, the Devil or Beelzebub, are not all-powerful; they have to submit to the Lordship of Jesus, an authority that was demonstrated in his cross-work, for, according to Colossians 2, he disarmed those *'principalities and powers'*, and *'made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them'*. So as Christians, we can rest assured in the certain knowledge that as 1 John 4:4 instructs us, *'He that is in us is greater than he that is in the world.'*

You see, Jesus is in the business of transforming lives, because he loves us, and he has saved us for a holy and heavenly purpose. Jesus cast the demons out of the man and instantly the man was saved for a new direction and mission in life. Like Legion, we, too, were also at one time *'dead in trespasses and sins'*; we, too, *'lived according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience'*; but because God is *'rich in mercy'*, and because of his *'great love for us'*, *'he has delivered us from the power of darkness and has translated us into the kingdom of his Son'* (Ephesians 2: 1-2,4). Indeed, God has made us alive together with Christ. We have been redeemed; we have been set free through the gospel-power of God, for Christ is *'the Way and the Truth and the Life'*. Remember that when we came to faith in Jesus, when we gave ourselves to him and trusted in him for salvation, he came to live in us through the Holy Spirit. Please take note, for this is important: when you gave yourself to Jesus, **he gave himself to you**. He lives in you and me right now! The Holy Spirit has power over us to make us do what we would not naturally do. When we love one another; when we forgive and forget; when we show care and concern for those like Legion; when we refuse to do wrong things, even though we've been asked to do them by our boss or manager, that is the Spirit of Christ operating in our lives, seeking to fulfil the will of God in all that we do for him and for his glory.

It is a Story of Triumph

Legion was no longer 'Legion'. He was now free from those 6000 evil spirits and their gloating; he was no longer incarcerated in a demonic prison; he was no longer full of anger and anguish, hatred and hostility, but full of life and love and lightness of spirit in the Lord; he was 'floating on cloud 9', as we would say! When the townspeople came to look what had happened, they were amazed to see the man who had been demon-possessed sitting down, clothed, and in his right mind, the very man who had had the 'legion' and was such a threat to them. What is remarkable, however, is that they were more fearful now he was free of the evil spirits than they were when he was possessed. So they asked

Jesus to leave their territory, even though he had removed those 6000 demons from their region, via the herd of pigs, so that they could no longer pose a threat to anyone else.

As Jesus was getting into the boat to go back to Galilee, the man begged to go with him. You see, he was no longer bound by the demons; he was no longer bound by the fetters that other people had put him in - he wanted to be bound to Jesus. But, Jesus did not let him go with him. Instead, he said, *'Go home to your people and report to them what great things the Lord has done for you, and how he had mercy on you.'*

You see, the Lord wanted him to go back to the people who had shunned him and shackled him - the very people he had shamed and terrified - and tell them his testimony of how Jesus had saved him. And so, he went away and began to proclaim in Decapolis what great things Jesus had done for him; and everyone marvelled. Indeed, his mission was to be the first person to preach about the salvation of Christ to the Gentiles. He was the first missionary to the Gentiles, even before Paul. It's possible that his ministry paved the way for Paul.

What is our special mission as a disciple of Christ? In what direction is God sending us? What is the message he is giving us to share? This morning, I hope we will all seek out the answer to those questions, if we don't already know, because no one else can be the reflection of Christ that only we were saved to be, and no one else can accomplish the special mission that we were transformed to fulfil. After all, we have in the words of Matt Redman, not a mere 6000 reasons, but 10,000 reasons, and more, to 'Bless the Lord' this morning and to live for him in the week ahead. Amen.

Song: *And Can It Be?*

(If you're online, click [here](#) to listen, or just read the words)

And can it be that I should gain
An interest in the Saviour's blood?
Died he for me, who caused his pain?
For me, who him to death pursued?
Amazing love! How can it be
That thou, my God, shouldst die for me?

He left his Father's throne above -
So free, so infinite his grace -
Emptied himself of all but love,
And bled for Adam's helpless race.
'Tis mercy all, immense and free;
For, O my God, it found out me!

Long my imprisoned spirit lay
Fast bound in sin and nature's night;
Thine eye diffused a quickening ray -
I woke, the dungeon flamed with light,
My chains fell off, my heart was free,
I rose, went forth, and followed thee.

No condemnation now I dread;
Jesus, and all in him, is mine!
Alive in him, my living head,
And clothed in righteousness divine,
Bold I approach the eternal throne,
And claim the crown, through Christ, my own

Closing Prayer

Glorious Father, you created us to worship you, and that is why this morning we have come into your presence, to bring our offering of praise and thanksgiving.

As we prepare to start a new week, we pray that you will go with us and keep us ever mindful of every blessing that we have and will have in Christ our Saviour. May we know in a deeply personal way your presence and boundless love through your Spirit. Be our hiding place and shield from every evil plan of the enemy, especially at this time of lockdown, whether it is an attack from the spirit of loneliness, the spirit of frustration, or the spirit of worry and anxiety. For your love is freedom, your touch is healing, your voice is calm. In Jesus' name, we trust and pray, Amen.

The Grace

'May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God our Father, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with us all and forever more. Amen.'