

The Gift That Keeps on Giving

3-Year Bible Reading Plan

By Dr. Jeff Meyers

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Crossroads Ministries
301 S. 8th Street
Opelika, Alabama 36801

Website: www.fbcopelika.com
Online Sermons: www.sermonaudio.com/jeffmeyers

This morning, I want to encourage you to open your Bibles to the book of Mark 1, the Gospel of Mark. We're also gonna find ourselves spending quite a bit of time in chapter 5 of the Gospel of Mark. And as you're doing so, if you're a guest or visitor with us, about a year and a half ago we as a family of faith began a journey together, a journey that if you're not a part of already or maybe something has happened in the past, feel free to jump on board this very day as we're walking through the entirety of Scripture, typically about a chapter a day. As we were putting that plan together, as we're balancing the Old Testament with the New Testament, the prophets with the Psalms etc., one of our strategic goals is that we wanted to make sure that we were reading a Gospel account during what you and I know as the Christmas season. As we celebrate Emmanuel, as we celebrate the birth of Jesus Christ, it only makes sense that during those days we would be reading through one of the Gospel accounts of his birth, his life, his ministry, his death, and eventually his resurrection.

Well, as you begin to read this week through the Gospel of Mark, you must admit it doesn't feel real Christmasy at all. In fact, the Gospel of Mark does not contain the story of the nativity, it does not contain the story of the star, the angels shouting, the magi traveling. There's no Mary and Joseph. There's no King Herod. All of the trappings, all of the tradition of the story that we know as Christmas, absolutely none of it is found in the Gospel of Mark. However, for our culture today, particularly in the 21st century, the Gospel of Mark, culturally speaking, may be the most relevant of the four for the Christmas season. You say, "Well, how is that?" Well, when you get to the end of the Gospel of Mark in chapter 16, you discover that the Lord inspired these words through a young man who was in his teenage years at the time. So much of our Christmas season revolves around children, does it not? It involves their activities, their endeavors, their desires, and such. Also when you look at the book of Mark, you'll notice it's very brief. It's the shortest of the four Gospels and it begins somewhat abruptly and it ends somewhat abruptly, kind of like the Christmas season, is it not? I mean, all of a sudden we put everything out, the decorations, the festivities, and before you know it in Canada it's Boxing Day and we're putting it all back up again. I mean, it's just over.

So we always look back and say it went so quickly, but I think the thing about the Gospel of Mark and its testimony of Jesus Christ that so resonates, at least with me this

Christmas season, is that it's the Gospel of chaos. You say, "The Gospel of chaos?" If you've been reading through Mark this week, you'll notice that the Lord did inspire teenagers, that's why it kind of feels the way it does, that we go from one event to another event and there's no pause in between. I mean, everything is rushed, it is hurried, it is quick and all of a sudden we're at the baptism of Jesus, then we're in the wilderness, and then we're here, then we're there. Did you know that in 16 chapters, there's a phrase that is used 63 times in the Gospel of Mark: and immediately. Could that not be a good description of this season in our life? And immediately I've got to bake something for the office party. And immediately I forgot about the concert tonight. And immediately. I mean, that is kind of that vibe of this season, is it not?

So in the midst of the chaos, in the midst of the abruptness of the season, I want to take us to the first chapter of Mark. I want to take us to three simple verses where in the midst of the chaos, we see a pause, we see a community gathered together around the person of Jesus Christ and I want you to see what transpires because what we're about to see is the gift that keeps on giving. It says there in verse 32 of Mark 1. It says,

32 And at even, when the sun did set, they brought unto him all that were diseased, and them that were possessed with devils. 33 And all the city was gathered together at the door. 34 And he healed many that were sick of divers diseases, and cast out many devils; and suffered not the devils to speak, because they knew him.

Now that may sound like just an antidote in the midst of the chaos of the Gospel of Mark but I want to just pause for a moment and think about this. In the midst of "and immediately" and here and there and time crunches, the sun had set, the day had drawn to a close, and the people of the community gathered themselves around Jesus and what he does for them is he gives each and every one of them the proverbial gift that keeps on giving.

Now when I use that phrase, I'm not talking about the jelly of the month club that we joke about in this season, but I want you to think about the giving of this season and this is one of those times in the year where we tend to go to extravagant lengths to show people that we care and love for them, and we give gifts, obviously some bulk of the wise men bringing gifts unto Jesus, the Christ child, but as we process, and by the way this is not gonna be an anti-consumerism, anti-materialistic, anti-gift message, but do you realize at least in our culture this year, it is expected that the average financial amount on a person that the gifts they will receive will be about \$1,000 a person. I know some of you think, "I wish that average would be in my house." Well, that is the average of such and as an entire culture this year, we will spend approximately 1 trillion dollars on what we know as Christmas. Those gifts will be endeared, they will be sincere. Oftentimes we give gifts that because of the thought that was behind the gift, brings a swell of emotion and tears. It doesn't matter how much thought you put in the gift, it doesn't matter how much money that you spend on the gift, you and I understand the reality, right? That whatever we give, whatever we receive, given enough time will eventually fade in the distance. Eventually

it will rust, it will mold, it will disintegrate. Given enough time, anything made of a material item is going to do such.

Now it may last a very elongated period of time, even outlasting your own very life, but there is no gift that you will give or receive this year that will be eternal. None of them. Maybe long lasting but not eternal. I want you to see the gift that Jesus gives these individuals in these three verses. He gives a gift that we're gonna see in just a moment may be the very thing that we're looking for, and secondly, I want you to understand that every single person who is in his presence was eligible for the gift. And so you and I today find ourselves in the midst of the chaos of the season, whether we realize it or not, craving a gift and wondering if it is available.

I want you to see what happens in verse 32. It says, "And at even, when the sun did set, they brought unto him all that were diseased, and them that were possessed with devils." You get to verse 34, "And he healed many that were sick and he cast out the devils." Now I'm about to utilize a word that we rarely hear in a church, much less Baptist context, but the gift that takes place here is the gift of deliverance. Now oftentimes we hear of dueling banjos when we hear that word, that famous movie. Or oftentimes we hear of religious expressions that would make us uncomfortable at best, but when you think of the word "deliverance," it's not only a biblical word, it's a wonderful word.

Now when we think of delivering, our context, typically we think of Amazon, do we not? We think of something somewhere else being brought to another location, and you do understand that is what the word means? By the way, as an aside I heard a humorous story this week of a young lady who had purchased a lot of items on Amazon. This is a true story. You can go and look it up. Had discovered that there had been some burglaries this time of the season as we unfortunately see people taking things off their front porch, so she had a brilliant idea. She took all of her trash and her garbage, put it back in the Amazon boxes, taped it up and the thieves took her trash away for her for free. It was a great idea. Everybody in our community is gonna have Amazon boxes on the front porch this week, just hoping. But by definition it just means to go from one location to the next.

Let me expand that biblically speaking. The word "deliverance," you can go and look it up in the dictionary, it means "to rescue or to set free." Now I want you to think about to rescue. That implies that there's some type of peril. That implies that we're in a place that we don't need to be. It implies that there's something happening that's not enjoyable. Is that not a description of many if not all of our lives? There's areas of our life and it may be small but it's significant that need to be rescued. You know, the Bible says in Galatians 1:4 that when Jesus Christ came – listen to this – he came to deliver us from this present evil world. In other words, the purpose, the goal was to take us out of this place and as Ephesians 1 says, to place us in the heavenlies.

So when we talk about being delivered, understand it means being rescued. It also means to be set free. In the book of 2 Corinthians 10, it says that the weapons of our warfare that are expanded on in Ephesians 6, they're not earthly, they're not fleshly, they're not carnal like the world is propagating, but they're spiritual and listen to this, to the tearing down of

strongholds. The picture that we have there is somebody who is desiring to move forward but is being held back by something.

Now I would daresay that based on those two definitions, being in a place or experiencing something you have no desire to experience or a place you desire to be, or being held back from that which you desire to be, every single one of us can identify with that. Every one of us. So I want to give you an assignment this morning, it's just between you and the Lord, and what is that item in your life? For some of you it may be as extreme as an addiction. For others it may be a fear, maybe a question, maybe a doubt, maybe an emotion, maybe a relationship, maybe finances, maybe the impending New Year and what may or may not come, or it may be the years past and will it be revealed. Every one of us has something in our life that we wish would trade places, or has something in our life that is holding us back. What did Jesus do with these individuals? He delivered them. He rescued them. He set them free.

You know, every one of those items that you personally thought of, I'd be willing to say this: there's not an amount of money that can buy the answer, is there? You see, oftentimes we throw money at it. Oftentimes we throw our energy at it. Sometimes it even makes it worse. But I want you to notice the desire that this city had. It's the same desire that we need to have in our lives. Look at verse 33, it says, "And all the city was gathered together at the door." Do you find it interesting that in a world of disease and devils, in a world of needing rescue and freedom, that everybody showed up at the door where Jesus was?

You know, this is the season, we even have terms like Black Friday and Cyber Monday and Giving Tuesday, this is the season where in abundance we show up to events and ceremonies and celebrations and shopping. Now I'm gonna address a rhetorical issue and please understand I'm not trying to be crass and I'm preaching to the proverbial choir. You find it interesting all the issues that you just assigned, all the things that you want to be rescued from, all of the things that you want to be set free from, how many times do we run to something other than the Lord to solve it?

You know, it goes without saying that we, like every other congregation in the world, we've empty seats today. We'll have empty seats at all of our services. It's just a part of life and yet you wonder why do the doctors not have any empty appointments? Why do the counselors not have any openings? Why do the shops have to order extra materials for this item just to keep up with the demand? Because unfortunately we fall into the same trap that they did even in Jesus' day. Let me show you that trap. Go over to chapter 5. There's a famous story here of a woman, a woman who's been diseased for 12 years, a woman who needs to be rescued, a woman who needs to be set free, a woman who has one simple desire, "I want to be fixed." I know that's overly simplistic but does it not resonate in your life? And maybe on that issue that's just between you and God, no matter what others may or may not think about it, is that not your heart's cry today? You just want it to be solved. You just want to be fixed. You just want it to be addressed. You just want to be set free. After 12 years, notice in verse 25 of Mark 5, it says, "And a certain woman, which had an issue of blood twelve years," listen to verse 26, "And had suffered

many things of many physicians, and had spent all that she had, and was nothing bettered, but rather grew worse." You know one of the tragedies and travesties of this season is that we think if we spend a certain amount of money and buy a certain thing, that whatever it is we're trying to band-aid will be solved and it makes it worse. Why? Because the issue is not solved and we owe somebody money, and we discover that maybe by getting together with a certain amount of people or a certain time, maybe that'll solve some things or having this event or that event and giving this and receiving that. For 12 years she had seen everybody who said they had an answer. For 12 years she exhausted, she drained her bank account, in our terminology, she had maxed out every credit card she had. What does it say? She wasn't any better, in fact, it had gotten worse.

You know, for those of you who the issue that you have in your own life, if it's been one that's been longer than 12 months, can I ask you a very difficult honest question? How is it today versus a year ago? How is it today versus five years ago? Because I think you and I get caught up in the same trap. We run to the things of the world. She had run here, she had run there, she had gotten advice, she had gotten help, unfortunately though she found herself in a position, the rest of the story is all she wanted to do was touch the hem of Jesus' robe. That's all she wanted to do. Her faith was such when she did so, Jesus stopped and says, "Who touched me for virtue has left me?"

Not only do we see an incredible demand, it says all the city showed up, but I want you to see the desire of these people. You see, in the first five or six chapters of the Gospel of Mark, we have certain stories that rise to the forefront. We have a man in chapter 1 who's demon possessed and he runs into the synagogue saying, "Jesus, please set me free!" At the end of chapter 1, we have a leper who's not only physically in pain but been ostracized from his community and his culture, throwing himself at the feet of Jesus saying, "Please help me!" In chapter 2, you have a man who is so sick he can't even get himself to Jesus, so four of his friends put him on a bed and actually lower him through the roof. Chapter 5, you have a man who is so demonized, he's so possessed by the enemy nobody in town wants to be around him. Later on, you have a man by the name of Jairus whose daughter is physically dead and there's no doctor that can help in the situation. Then you have this woman. What's interesting is those are five very unique stories. Some of them involved community reputation. Some of them involved the final answer of death. Some of them had been going on for 12 years. Some of them may have just happened. But I think they're all represented back in verse 33 of chapter 1 when it says all of the city showed up. Now I don't know if all those five individuals were there at that moment because Jesus is covering an incredible area. What I want you to hear is this: it doesn't matter what the issue is, it doesn't matter what the struggle is, it doesn't matter what the addiction is, it doesn't matter what the fear is, what we see in these first few chapters of Mark is there is nothing that is beyond what Jesus can take care of in our lives.

I want you to go back to chapter 1 and I want you to see something very distinctive. I think this is important for the discussion today because the gift that Jesus gives, the gift of being rescued, the gift of freedom can't be bought with US currency, it can't be charged to your favorite credit card, it can't be put on a tab. Notice what it says, verse 32,

"they brought all those that were diseased and those that were possessed with devils." Verse 35, "He healed those of diverse diseases and he cast out many devils." What you see here in Mark 1 is something you see not only throughout the entire Gospel of Mark but the entire story of Jesus laid out in the Gospels, that when people were struggling, when people were battling through what we know as life and they came to him, Jesus always classified it, the Bible always classifies it as one of two items, it is either a physical abnormality or it is a spiritual issue.

Now we struggle with this in our culture. Why? Because everything in our culture is diagnosed as physical. Don't believe me? When's the last time somebody suggested something other than a pill or a program for whatever you're dealing with? When's the last time that someone, a clinician in whatever area, said, "Maybe Matthew 17:21 is right, this kind only comes out by prayer and fasting"? What do we tend to do? We tend to throw the physical at it because we just presume it's a physical issue. Interesting. That's the Western world, in the Eastern world, everything is spiritual and so they're just as imbalanced as we are but what does Jesus say? "Hey, some of you are sick and some of you are spiritually struggling."

Whatever it is in life, yours, mine, whomever, one of the hardest questions we have to ask ourselves is this: is what I'm walking through, is what I'm struggling with, is this a physical issue or is this a spiritual issue? Now by the way, I've already gone through the characters in these first few chapters of Mark, do you know what you notice? Both. The first guy that shows up in the synagogue in chapter 1, it was a spiritual issue that Jesus took care of. The leper who comes at the end of the chapter, it was a physical issue. Leprosy was a physical disease that Jesus healed him from. I find it interesting it's not just an antidote here in these three verses that there were some that were sick and some that were struggling spiritually, but actual real people from both camps had the touch of Jesus in their life within the same chapter.

But I want you to notice chapter 2. Look one page to the right. This man who was brought by his friends through the roof. It's a very famous story. We not only preach and teach it, there's been songs that have been written about it. I want you to notice what Jesus does to this man. In verse 5 he says, "Son, your sins be forgiven you." That's interesting. Last time I checked, sin's a spiritual problem, is it not? Sin is our rebellion against our God and our Creator. Sin is a spiritual problem but everybody begins to question how can this man forgive sins? As you read the rest of the story, you remember what Jesus does? He says, "So you will believe that I have the ability to forgive sins. You, son, take up your bed, rise and walk." And he takes off out of the house. What Jesus was showing is what he said about his sin had happened because what he could say about his body followed.

Do you find it interesting that the first person in Mark has a spiritual issue, the second person has a physical issue, and the third person has both? And so when we come to these issues of life, these struggles, these fears, these questions, these doubts, whatever it may be, I think it's very imperative that we're willing to have a real honest conversation with the Lord, is what I'm struggling with just a physical abnormality possibly like the Apostle

Paul dealt with in 2 Corinthians 12, the thorn in the flesh, or is it spiritual? By the way, there's a great debate on what that is, that thorn in the flesh, was it physical, was it spiritual, was it both? But sometimes the most honest prayer you could have with the Lord is say, "Is this something that pills and programs won't take care of? Is this only something that prayer and fasting will eliminate?"

I want you to go back to chapter 5 for just a moment, the famous story of the demoniac, because maybe there's that question mark in your mind, going, "Well, I don't know. I've been dealing with this for so long, I've been struggling for so long, I've been doubting, I've been questioning for so long. I'll be honest, I've gotten caught up in the weeds. I don't know if it's physical. I don't if it's spiritual. I don't know what it is." I want you to be introduced to a man and we're not going to read the entirety of his story because we know his story. He is possessed by a legion of demons. You say, "What does that mean?" At least 2,000. Jesus encounters him and he's in a bad place. The Bible says that he makes his life or he makes his house among the tombs. He's consistently cutting himself. He's screaming. He's hollering. He is so violent that nobody in town will associate with him. They're scared of him. Jesus arrives on the scene, discovers this man is possessed by a multitude of demons of which when Jesus cast out, they run into the pigs and they drown themselves in what we know as the Sea of Galilee.

What I want you to notice is what happens to this man once he is rescued, once he is set free, and the reason this is important is because if our issue is spiritual, if our issue is a spiritual struggle, then our rescue will look a whole lot like verse 15 of this chapter. Notice what it says, "And they came to Jesus and they see that he that was possessed with a devil, that had the legion," listen to this, "sitting clothed and in his right mind." Interesting that when the spiritual issue is addressed, he is seated, he is clothed and in his right mind. What does that mean for us as we diagnose our own struggles in life? Seated means he was in control. Can I give you a statement that was given to me years ago and I use it all the time? In your life, if you're not in control, something else is. Now I didn't say pain, did I? Pain's a whole, pain's physical. But if you're not in control of that issue, if you're not in control of that struggle, if it's controlling you, then it may not be physical, it may be spiritual because here this man, this struggle he had, he could not be controlled by others and he was not in control himself. You see, there's a lot of your today dealing with physical pain and you're in agony but you're in absolute control of what's happening, the problem is you're just in a lot of pain. This man was out of control. Things were happening and being experienced where he had no control of his life.

The second thing is this, it says he was clothed. You say, "Why is that important?" Let me take you back to the garden of Eden, chapter 3. Adam and Eve fall into sin. When they realized that they had a spiritual problem with God, what did they do? They tried to clothe themselves, did they not? You know, that's one of the travesties of our culture today, everybody's trying to take everything off because nobody thinks they have a problem with God anymore. That's a freebie, by the way. You can write it down. It's a Meyerism. But they tried to clothe themselves. What did the Lord do later in the chapter? He prepared clothes for them. When the priests were to go into the tabernacle in the temple, they were to change their clothes. Something was to alter. You see, one of the

things we know if we're dealing with a spiritual issue is we have no shame. Folks, let me tell you something, if your issue is spiritual, you will justify it and you will defend it and you will protect it. Nobody justifies being physically sick. They hate it. They're upset about it. "I wish I felt good." But if our struggle is spiritual, we will justify it and we'll try to get other people to promote it and celebrate it because we're out of control.

Last thing, he's in his right mind. You know, it's interesting that the man in chapter 1 who was in the synagogue and this man in the garden of Gadarene, not only were they out of control, not only after the fact were they seated and clothed, in their right mind, their behavior was completely irrational. Yelling. Screaming. Hollering. I mean, out of control, both of them. And it's kind of a good litmus test for us. Whatever that concern, whatever the issue, whatever that struggle is in life, when it takes over our life is there screaming, yelling, hollering? Now I know some of you are dealing with physical pain right now and you say, "Man, when the pain hits, man, I cry out." You know there's a difference in what I'm talking about. It's a difference than the pain has hit an 11 on a scale of 10, and the difference is you're out of control, without shame, and you just want to demonstrate it before everybody. You see, we've got an important decision to make. There's this description here of what it looks like when we're rescued from spiritual versus what it looks like when we're healed from the physical.

I want you to go back to chapter 1 and we'll close the message today. I know it's not a typical Christmas message but can we all agree this is the gift we really need? That struggle, that issue, that addiction, that fear, that question, that problem, you know, the best Christmas gift for you today won't be something you wrap out of a box, or unwrap, the best Christmas present you get this year won't be a meal with family, the best gift you can get is waking up tomorrow and no longer having that struggle, no longer having that fear, no longer have whatever that battle may be. I want you to notice in verse 34 it says, "and he healed, and he cast out." I know you expect me to say this and it goes without saying, those who experience deliverance, it's because they experience the Deliverer. The only person who could touch them and heal, the only person who could cast out, the only person who could make true change in their life was Jesus.

I know we talk about the reason for the season, I know we talk about Emmanuel, God with us, it is more than a Christmas carol and a greeting card, for look at the characters of the nativity. Whether it be the magi who descended or whether it be Mary and Joseph themselves, we see in this story that they were rescued and they were set free and maybe this season their story and these individuals' stories can finally become our story.