

The Place of Deliverance

Deliverance

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 to two places in the New Testament of your Bible, the gospel of Mark 1 and the gospel of Luke 4. Now we're going to spend the majority of our time today in the gospel of Mark but there is a passage in Luke 4 that I don't want to just allude to, I hopefully want your eyes to see and your ears to hear. But we are continuing our walk through the gospel of Mark this season and as you're turning to those two passages, this weekend is the 20th anniversary of one of the most tragic and emotional events in most of our lives. We look back 20 years ago to that 9/11 event. The images will never leave our mind. The sounds will never leave our memory. Beyond the obvious, why does it resonate so much? Could it be that for the first time in our life but maybe the first time in our culture's life that we faced an enemy that was more about ideals and the cloak of the invisible than ever before? There weren't regiments in matching uniforms all lined up on the doorstep. There were concepts and ideals and imagery and those who had come against us, we didn't even know where to find them. The values, the ideas that they held were so contrary to life as we knew it. Twenty years ago, we entered a war with an enemy that you couldn't see and whose ideas were bent on destruction and yet today we fight numerous wars, not just that one specific one but we are being barraged on all sides because we live in a world today where we are constantly attacked by ideas, concepts, philosophies and agenda that go contrary to the freedom that Jesus Christ has promised each and every one of us. It was a war that woke us up 20 years ago that I daresay we may have soon fallen asleep two decades later.

Today as we turn to the gospel of Mark, for those of you that were not able to be with us last week, we're beginning a journey through the gospel of Mark under the auspice of deliverance. Now I know that's a word that can at times strike fear in our hearts but it simply means to be set free. It means to possess the liberty and the freedom that you and I were designed to have, and yet today we're going to see a man who is ravaged in the bondage of life and today as we walk through these issues, it's going to be real tempting to take a step back to look at this man and say, "I have nothing in common with him," but all the while you have everything in common with him.

In Mark 1, beginning in verse 21, Jesus as he normally would, walks into a synagogue and there's a man ravaged in bondage, needing freedom and liberty more than life itself. Verse 21, it says,

21 And they went into Capernaum; and straightway on the sabbath day he entered into the synagogue, and taught. 22 And they were astonished at his doctrine: for he taught them as one that had authority, and not as the scribes. 23 And there was in their synagogue a man with an unclean spirit; and he cried out, 24 Saying, Let us alone; what have we to do with thee, thou Jesus of Nazareth? art thou come to destroy us? I know thee who thou art, the Holy One of God. 25 And Jesus rebuked him, saying, Hold thy peace, and come out of him. 26 And when the unclean spirit had torn him, and cried with a loud voice, he came out of him. 27 And they were all amazed, insomuch that they questioned among themselves, saying, What thing is this? what new doctrine is this? for with authority commandeth he even the unclean spirits, and they do obey him. 28 And immediately his fame spread abroad throughout all the region round about Galilee.

Now as we walk through this passage, there's three areas that I want to kind of allow as a pattern, an outline for us that hopefully will help us bring this full circle into our own lives. I want us to see in just a moment that we have a setting that is very sacred but maybe not for the reasons that seem obvious at first. We have a solution that Jesus Christ brings that is his authority alone to possess. And finally, there's a struggle, there's a struggle that's painful for when this man is delivered it says that they tore him.

Let's begin with the setting. What is it that makes it such a sacred place? I mean, after all, this man did not get delivered in just kind of the crossroads of Main Street and First Avenue. This man did not get delivered at a local gathering of secular thought. He was in what we know as a synagogue but the thing I want you to notice in verse 21, he entered into the synagogue on the sabbath day. Can I share with you what did not make the setting sacred and then share with you what did? The geographical location of the place is not what made it holy and I think sometimes we fall into that trap. We think that somehow in a place such as this where we're gathered together today, that this place is more holy than other geographical places. A global pandemic taught us otherwise, did it not? It's tough to be in a "holy place" when you're in your living room watching from a distance. So again, it's not the geographical location that made this place sacred and it's not even the persons that were there. Think about it, there's pastors, there's priests, there's even scribes and they're astonished. Do you know what that tells me? They had never seen it before. They had never seen anybody truly set free. For the same people and in the same place we're just as in bondage as he was, it just hadn't manifested like his had.

So what was it that made this place sacred? What was it that made it holy? And then what is it that can allow us to walk "on sacred ground"? There are two things. The first one is this: you have the presence of God himself. God himself is in their midst. When Jesus Christ walks into the synagogue, God himself. It reminds me, the church of Laodicea in Revelation 3, you remember the imagery that they're having a service, there's a gathering of people but Jesus knocks on the door because he's not in the midst of them. Just

because you have a location and just because you have a crowd does not mean you have the presence of God in your midst.

The first thing is the presence of God but the second thing is the word of God, and this is where Luke 4 comes in handy. So if you have Luke 4 available, let me encourage you to turn to the right a few pages. Luke 4 is the first public message or sermon that Jesus Christ delivers in his public ministry. Allow me to share with you what he does. He walks in, he takes one of the scrolls, he opens it to Isaiah 61:1-2 and beginning verse 17 of Luke 4, I want you to hear the very first sermon that Jesus is recorded to publicly ever communicate. It says, "And there was delivered unto him the book of the prophet Esaias. And when he had opened the book, he found the place where it was written," listen to this, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the brokenhearted, to preach," listen, "deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised, To preach the acceptable year of the Lord." In other words, when we're back in Mark 1, even this day when somebody gathers in a synagogue to worship, when the people of Jewish faith gather, they don't read the latest commentaries, they don't read the latest news headlines, in fact, very specifically when they gather there's only one text that they read and they read the words of God. This is why in 1 Thessalonians 5 it is so critical when the Apostle Paul says to read his letters when they gather to worship, he was communicating, "These aren't my ideas, these are God's words."

So if you and I are going to find ourselves in a sacred holy place, there are two things that must necessarily be present: we must have the presence of God and we must have the word of God. So that's the setting, now what about the solution? What is it that's happening in this man's life and what is it that Jesus Christ communicates that we so desperately need to learn today? Well, for those of you like myself who grew up in what we might call a Baptist tradition, verse 23 is a little uncomfortable. It says and can I contemporize it? "And there was at church that day a man with an unclean spirit." It makes us a little uncomfortable, does it not? But notice verse 24, it says, "Saying, Let us alone; what have we to do with thee."

Now let me talk about this unclean spirit for just a moment. I think we need to define what it is and then we need to describe how it can be applicable to our own lives. The phrase "unclean spirit," there's one reference to it in the Old Testament, it's found in Zechariah 13, but it's 21 references in the New Testament, and every single time this description is used that somebody has an unclean spirit, it's in the plurality. In fact, probably the best case study is found in the gospel of Mark 5, we'll be there in a few weeks, where the demoniac in the Gadarenes, remember the man who's cutting himself and yelling and nobody could control him? It says that he has a legion of demons which statistically means at least 2,000. At the very beginning of that passage, it says there was a man in the Gadarenes who had an unclean spirit. And so that phrase or that descriptor is technically speaking about somebody who has been ravaged by the demonic.

Now by the way, just as an aside, we live in a world today where many people will claim, "Well, we don't see this like we used to. We don't experience this like in Jesus' day. It's

just a different day." But can I give you two aspects about this man that will parallel to our contemporary world today? Do you notice that when he spoke, he referred to himself with a plural pronoun and he's upset because he thinks everybody is there to judge him. I'll just let that simmer down for a little bit because we live in a world today where people want to identify by whatever they want to identify and think that anybody who speaks contrary must be judging them.

But at the same time, this man's hurting. He is crying out because he is ravaged. He is hurting and he's come to a point where he can no longer function as he's been functioning and so on this day, he finds himself in a sacred place where the presence of God and the word of God is present, so by literal strict definition, we have a man that is possessed, overcome and ravaged by the demonic. Now I understand that particularly in a context such as today there are many of you that say, "Well, I just can't relate to that. That's not my... I know some people that I think they can really relate to it but that's not my life." So even though you may not be specifically like this man was, let's take a step back for just a moment and let's talk about the things that ravage us even as believers, the things that bother us, the things that torment us. You know, you and I live in a world today where it seems that every headline can be categorized under fear-mongering. It doesn't matter what the headline is. It doesn't matter what the subject matter is. It could be about the economy, it could be about the pandemic, it could be about wars, it doesn't matter what it is, the tone is always fear and despair. That's the overriding theme and we get ravaged by it, do we not? We get paralyzed by it. We're concerned. We're overtly thinking and stressing and all of the levels in our body that should be normal get elevated and such. Do you know what the Bible says? In 2 Timothy 1:7, we have not been given the spirit of fear but of power and love and of a sound mind. You see, oftentimes we're ravaged by the fact of what took place in the past that we can't get over. Do you know what the Bible says in Psalm 103:12? It says that when Jesus Christ forgives you, that your sins are as just removed from you as the east is from the west. There are some of you that are ravaged and tormented about what may happen tomorrow and yet in Matthew 28 Jesus said, "I am with you until the end of the age."

What we discover is that this man's condition, though as awful as it is, may not be as far removed from us as we want to give it credit because oftentimes we're ravaged, we lose sleep, we worry, we're overtly concerned about issues that the Lord himself has spoken to very specifically which leads to the solution. What takes place in this passage? Look at verse 25. Jesus rebuked him saying, "Hold thy peace and come out of him." Now I want you to imagine today for the sake of a hypothetical yet theological illustration, I want you to imagine that you and I are in the exact historical scenario as they were here in Mark 1, that God is walking in the flesh, that he is over in what we know as the Middle East, the country of Israel, and that whatever's tormenting you, whatever is bothering you, whatever is ravaging you, if you'll just simply become in his presence, he can cast it all away. I would daresay that if we gave you a specific location and place, the other two service hours we have would be completely empty because everybody would be getting on a plane and going immediately. Why? Because we are a culture that spends every last dollar we've got trying to numb our pain and heal what's tormenting us, whatever it may be.

What's the solution? It's really pretty simple. When God speaks, when you're in the presence of God, that which is of the enemy, that which is contrary to the Lord is simply removed from our lives. Here's the problem, is there's no reason to get on that airplane or that boat or whatever transportation you so prefer because according to Acts 1, this same Jesus who in the presence of this man in the synagogue delivered him, he has ascended up on high and, yes, he's going to return one day but until then he's at the right hand of the Father. But here's the good news: Jesus Christ himself said in John 14 and in John 16 that he would depart from us but don't panic, "For I send another," what we know as the Holy Spirit, "the comforter, who will guide us into all truth."

You know, in 2 Corinthians 3:17, I want you to hear what the Bible says about the Holy Spirit. It says that where the Spirit of the Lord is there is liberty, there is freedom. In other words, it's not about us going to some remote location and tracking the Lord down and seeing if we can find him. The Bible makes this statement that if you have come to a place in your life where you have confessed you've got a sin condition, you have rebelled against God and you believe that Jesus Christ alone is the only one who can forgive you, he is the only one to save you, then according to that verse I just quoted, the Spirit of God not only dwells within you but has set you free. That means that as a believer in Jesus Christ, you have the right to be free. You have the right to possess liberty. In the midst of a world that is at war in all kinds of aspects, you can experience freedom, you can experience liberty. Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom, there is liberty.

But I understand some of you saying, "Well, I've been saved for decades. I've been saved for years. I'm not experiencing that." Do you remember back to the setting there are two things that had to take place, right? The presence of the Lord and the word of the Lord. And today if you're a believer in Jesus Christ, the presence of the Lord is within you, according to the Bible the Holy Spirit is indwelt within you. The other aspect is the word of the Lord, not just holding it in your hands, not just cerebrally acknowledging it but actually claiming what it says.

Some years ago, I had the privilege of being in what you and I would refer to as East Asia and can I just confess that when a young man from this culture finds himself on the mission field in East Asia, you see things you never saw in the church you grew up. You hear things you never heard. It is a whole different world. You see the "spiritual activity" of the enemy more blatantly than maybe you and I would in our context today. I would say that I was shocked at best and dismayed at worst, but there was a pastor that guided me along on that trip. He not only resided in that area but he had also visited the United States numerous times. He understands our culture. He understands our world and the story I'm about to share with you took place almost 25 years ago. That's important. Twenty-five years ago, I asked this pastor, I said, "Pastor, why is it that I don't see where I live what I see everyday here? Why is it that I don't see, I don't hear the things back home that I'm experiencing here?" Because the man that we just read about here in the synagogue, you see that every day in some of these places. I'll never forget his insight, his wisdom. Listen to what he said. He said, "Pastor Jeff, understand that where the word of God is preached and proclaimed, the enemy must go into hiding, but when the word of

God is not present or begins to subside, the enemy gets brazen and arrogant and he begins to show you who he really is."

Can we think about our culture over the last 25 years? What have we allowed with the word of God? It has decreased, has it not? What are we seeing in the world around us? We're seeing an increase in what we might refer to as the spiritually abnormal, things that cannot be explained with the textbooks that we've relied on for years and years and years. Why is that critical? Because maybe today you're a believer in Jesus Christ but there's an issue in your past, there's a problem in your present, there's a concern of your future, and it is ravaging you. It's not that you don't possess the Spirit of God, it's do you utilize the word of God because when Jesus Christ spoke, the demon left, and when God speaks, whatever he has said must be and come true. So if you're struggling, if you're ravaged, if you're doubting, whatever it may be and you say, "But I'm a believer, I should not be experiencing this," your freedom, your liberty is just a passage in scripture away where we go to that passage that says we do not possess the spirit of fear, we go to that passage that says, "I will be with you to the end of the age," we go to that passage that says, "I will never leave you, I will never forsake you," we go to that passage where it says, "Nobody and no thing can pluck you out of my hand." You see, the solution for freedom in the midst of bondage is when we have the Spirit of God within us and we believe the word of God that is before us. You see, the solution, here's the best part about it, financially it's absolutely free. To be saved by the blood of Jesus Christ cost him everything, cost you nothing and if you don't already possess a Bible, we'll give you one absolutely free. No plane ticket. No boat ticket. No appointment to set up. No co-pay to pay.

The solution is right in our very midst which leads to the struggle. Why is it so hard? Why is it so difficult to believe? Why is it so tortuous to go forward? I want you to notice what happens to this young man in verse 26. So understand the setting: the presence of God, the word of God. "And when the unclean spirit had torn him, and cried with a loud voice, he came out of him." I don't know about you but the majority of our culture, myself included, we long for the road that is most easily paved. There is none of us that wakes up in the morning and says, "Man, I just want the most difficult path humanly possible today." Now there are some of you that do that but the most of us, we're not interested, all right? We long for comfort. We long for ease. For this individual to experience the freedom he so desired, the liberty he so desired, there was going to be a struggle. Do you know in Ephesians 6 it says that our fight is not with flesh and blood, our fight is with principalities and powers and rulers of darkness, that little small voice that the enemy speaks that leads to that doubt, that fear, that anxiety, that unbelief, whatever it may be.

So again there is a battle raging that may not be seen and it may not be heard but it is as real as anything else but here's the painful part of it, the struggle is painful because it tore him. Can we go back to Luke 4 for just a moment? Now I want you to think about this. Jesus Christ walks into the synagogue, opens up Isaiah 61, says, "I have come to set the captives free. I have come so that you will no longer be in bondage, you'll no longer be ravaged, you'll no longer experience some of these things." I want you to fast forward to

verse 28. Jesus gets done preaching, communicating, expounding on these ideas, listen to what it says, "And all they in the synagogue, when they heard these things, were filled with wrath, And rose up, and thrust him out of the city, and led him unto the brow of the hill whereon their city was built, that they might cast him down headlong. But he passing through the midst of them went his way." Isn't that interesting, they didn't want to be free, they didn't want liberty because they knew the pain that it would cause.

Allow me to elaborate. When you take a stand for the word of God, those who you "in the flesh" love most may be the most in opposition. When you stand for the word of God and you declare what God has said jointly with the Spirit of God that is within you, it becomes a very isolated, lonely, not receiving the latest, greatest work environment. When we decide to do it God's way, the world doesn't celebrate. It is painful knowing that if we render this decision and we believe whatever it may be that we not only will not receive accolades, we may, in turn, even receive persecution. Why is it that so few people in the respective fields get to the level of "success" that we all desire to attain is because of the pain that is involved.

Hopefully you will find this humorous, but some years ago in another state, I had an individual that was serving on a ministerial staff and he was looking around one day and he said, "Jeff, I want you to know I'm never going to pastor a church the size of this one, the one you're pastoring." I said, "Well, friend, man, you're a great preacher, you're an incredible person, why do you say that?" And he said, "Because I don't want to work as hard as you do." Why? Because anytime we're going to break through those difficulties, whatever it may be, there's pain that is involved. The great premier athletes, yes, don't get me wrong, some of them just have the hand of God on them but most of them are willing to put in the time others aren't. Those who have built businesses, they're willing to put in the... There's always when there's a struggle, there's always pain to get to the "other side." When it comes to personal spiritual freedom, the pain of loneliness, the pain of isolation, the pain of saying nobody agrees with me but God and his word alone. Most of us never experience the freedom God wants for us because we're not willing for it to be just us and God. I'll repeat that: most of us don't want the freedom that God desires for us because we don't want it to be just us and God.

So the struggle is painful. I'll close with this anecdote. Some years ago, I had the privilege of being a part of the Billy Graham Crusades years ago, obviously prior to his death, and being a part of those, I heard a story. I didn't get it verified by Dr. Graham himself but I know it's true. Do you know that Dr. Graham stated that after the Crusade in the evening, now you know, oftentimes these go weeks, two weeks, back in the '70s they would go for six, seven weeks in length, that when he would go back to his hotel room, that they said oftentimes he could barely get out of bed before it was time to go preach the next night. Now I didn't say he didn't wake up. There's a difference, right? He claimed that there was so much doubt that was put in his mind, there was so much fear that was put in his mind, there was so much anxiety that was put in his mind realizing the task that was before him and the responsibility. He said, "I felt as if I was being held to the bed all day long." How many of you feel like you're held to your desk chair all day long? You're held to your couch, whatever it may be? What did he say? Every afternoon of all those

Crusades, do you know what he did? He gathered people together and said, "I need you to pray." Yes, pray for the lost souls, but you know, I've been a part of those prayer meetings, we actually prayed that he'd get out of bed not because he was tired but because he was struggling with the freedom and the liberty that God had given him and that he desires to give us. You and I as believers in Jesus Christ have the right to be free but we've got to do it God's way.

Let's pray with our heads bowed and our eyes closed. Maybe this morning you've walked into this place or you're watching online and you would confess that you are ravaged with the issues and struggles of life. I want to go back to that first qualification, the Spirit of God, because the word of God is great but without the Spirit of God there's no power. And maybe today you're that person, maybe you're religious, maybe your well being, you're altruistic, you're giving, you're generous but you're not what the Bible calls born again, you're not saved and maybe today is that day where you realize, as I shared earlier, your sin condition and the power that Jesus Christ has to save you and forgive you. The Bible says in Romans 10 whoever calls on the name of the Lord will be saved and maybe today the first step for you to the freedom and the liberty and the deliverance that you've desired for so many years is that aspect of having the Spirit of God within you that only come from belief in Jesus Christ. If you're that person today, would you do as Romans 10 says, would you just cry out, would you just call out to him? It's not about repeating a certain phrase or checking off a box or passing a test. This is your heart's cry and maybe your heart's cry would go something like this. "God, I am a sinner. I have strayed from you. I have rebelled against you but I believe that Jesus Christ has come to set me free and to save me from my sin condition. God, I believe, I believe that Jesus Christ loved me so much that he was willing to come and be born on my behalf. God, I believe that Jesus Christ loved me so much that he rejected all temptation, lived a sinless life on my behalf. And God, I believe that Jesus Christ loved me so much that when he went to his cross, the nails that held him there, that was my sin that took him there. And God, I believe that three days later when he rose from the dead, he made it possible for my sins to be forgiven and my soul to be saved. God, today at this very moment, I'm claiming nothing more and nothing less than the blood of Jesus Christ for the salvation of my soul. Lord, I don't have all the problems and issues of life solved but I do know this one, that Jesus Christ is the answer to my sin problem."

If you're that person this morning who cried out to the Lord either here in person or online, can I encourage you in a moment just to step out and step forward on our campus. We've got a team set aside, we've got people set aside, we've got a room set aside just to hear your story, to pray with you and pray for you. Or maybe, just maybe, you've been a believer for years, maybe even decades, and though not asking for a show of hands, you would confess right now just in a prayer position between you and God that there are things that are tormenting you and ravaging you. You have the right through the Spirit of God and the word of God to be free. May today be the day that you may not walk forward but you walk out claiming the promises that God has for you.

Lord Jesus, as we come to this time of decision, thank you, thank you that in the midst that we are so unworthy you are so merciful, you are so graceful, you are so giving, you

are so loving, you are so kind that you would want us to be free in the midst of all the bondage of life. Help us today to trust and believe what you've said and nobody else. It is in the name of Jesus Christ we pray. Amen.