



Peace in the Middle of a Pandemic – Part 3 I Can Set You Free

Wherever you are watching from right now—and whatever outfit or pajamas you’re wearing—I am glad you tuned in with us today. I’m excited for us to hear from God through His Word in Mark 5. If you have a Bible or phone or iPad, let’s get to God’s Word.

Last week we saw how Jesus demonstrated His power over the storm in Mark 4. We’re in this series called “Peace in the Middle of a Pandemic” and are seeing how Jesus brought peace in the midst of this storm. We’re praying—just like I’m sure you are—that Jesus would calm the storm in our world right now.

A virus that started in a small province has now spread and is spreading across the world. As we read different articles and hear in the news, part of what makes this virus so dangerous is because it exploits pre-existing conditions. That’s why we want to pay careful attention to those who are elderly or who are immunocompromised—people with physical conditions that make some of us more vulnerable to the danger of this disease. As I’ve been thinking and praying about this, I realized there are different kinds of pre-existing conditions that also make this time so dangerous to so many of us. Let me give you a couple examples, just from reading some of the experts.

Addiction. This time of social distancing and isolating ourselves from others—which we should be doing for our own safety and the good of others—makes those who struggle with addictions much more vulnerable. Why? Whenever we face stress or anxiety, especially if we’re wrestling with addiction, we tend to depend on our familiar coping mechanisms. Liquor store sales are up. Restaurants allow us to pick up cocktails from the bar. So many people are depending on the coping mechanism of alcohol or other forms of substance abuse.

Depression. This is another pre-existing condition that so many people in our church and families and in this world are wrestling with. This time of social distancing forces us to be alone as we’re isolated from our normal routines. Those thoughts that nag us can resurface and drive us into a dark time of depression.

Pornography. Research says worldwide traffic has grown by 12-20%. Here’s the thing. It’s not just the amount of pornography that has increased. What’s more troubling is the type of pornography that

has increased. I won't get into the details, but needless to say, if that's something you wrestle with, it makes you vulnerable to marriage conflict.

I read an article that said once marriage registration offices reopened in China, they've seen an unprecedented number of divorce appointments. The article said, "Stuck at home with nothing to do and nowhere to go, couples will find that extra time together will either draw them closer together, or it will bring all the reasons they enjoy being apart into sharp realization." The pre-existing challenges in our marriages are exposed and exploited as pressure is put on couples.

Along with this deep pain, there is a spike in domestic violence cases. We see this all over the internet right now. Right here in our metropolitan area, DC Safe—a non-profit organization that coordinates emergency victim services—said their call load has doubled in the last few weeks. The executive director says, "We're overwhelmed. We literally don't have enough response-line phones to go around."

As you see, there are physical pre-conditions that make the spread of this virus extraordinarily dangerous. There are so many other kinds of pre-existing conditions in our lives and hearts that make this time especially vulnerable for each of us. If you're honest, some of you have found yourself thinking, "Okay, God. Everybody's praying for You to stop that storm out there, but what about the storm in here? What about the storm that is wreaking havoc in my heart during this time, that's wreaking havoc in my life, in my finances, in my family? What are You going to do about this storm?"

In Mark 5, we meet a man who desperately needs help. He needs healing and deliverance, not just from what's going on around him, but from what's going on inside him. Maybe that's you or someone you know. So right where you are, take a minute between you and God, asking Him to speak to you today through His Word.

Father, Your Word is powerful. It always does everything You send it forth to accomplish. So would You work by the power of Your Holy Spirit through Your Word. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

I have three simple points from this story we're going to look at in Mark 5. We'll walk through the story as we elaborate on these points.

1. Satan wants you to live in bondage.

Let's pick up the story in Mark 5:1:

¹ [Jesus and His disciples] came to the other side of the sea, to the country of the Gerasenes. ² And when Jesus had stepped out of the boat, immediately there met him out of the tombs a man with an unclean spirit. ³ He lived among the tombs. And no one could bind him anymore, not even with a chain, ⁴ for he had often been bound with shackles and chains, but he wrenched the chains apart, and he broke the shackles in pieces. No one had the strength to subdue him. ⁵ Night and day among the tombs and on the mountains he was always crying out and cutting himself with stones.

This is a desperate man. In verse 15, Mark says he was demon-possessed. We learn later that he is being wrecked by many different demons. Look at how Mark describes this man. He's being terrorized by demons. Look at their strategy. First, they isolate him. He was living in the tombs, isolated from the outside world, disconnected from his normal relationships. He was intentionally living in a place of death, surrounding himself with things that only reinforced the despair he felt. Some of us have been there, right? We've been in a place where things are so bad that we don't even want to be reminded of what's good.

This man was isolated, but he was also empowered—or at least that's what it looks like at first. Mark says nobody could restrain him. People tried multiple times, probably because he was a danger to himself and everyone else. But apparently over time he was so empowered by demonic spirits that he literally ripped the shackles apart. Not only was he freed from their shackles, but he had also freed himself from clothing. He's out there naked. We know this because at the end of the story, he puts clothes back on. So my man is living super free right now.

He was isolated and empowered, but ultimately he was tormented. Look at the description in verse five: *"Night and day...he was always crying out and cutting himself with stones."* To me, this is the saddest part of this man's condition. Why? Because he had external freedom but internal bondage. He was free from shackles but possessed by demons. Nobody could control him, which probably felt so good and liberating, but the tragedy was he couldn't control himself. He broke free from the restraints of others, but he couldn't restrain what was eating away at him on the inside. There are so many things we can control, but what do we do with the things that control us?

His condition reminds me of the passage in our Bible Reading Plan yesterday. McLean Bible Church is in a Bible Reading Plan through the Psalms and yesterday we were in Psalm 88. The poet describes his condition and emotional state this way in verse three (NIV):, *"My soul is full of trouble, and my life draws near the grave."* In verse six he says to God, *"You have put me in the lowest pit, in the darkest depths."* Verse eight, *"I am confined and cannot escape. My eyes are dim with grief."* Verse 18 summarizes the whole Psalm with, *"Darkness is my closest friend."*

Have you ever felt that way? Everybody on the outside sees this man as strong, but he's constantly wrestling on the inside with deep pain and brokenness.

Now, before we keep moving, there's a question you might be asking. Was this really demon possession or was this just mental illness? I'll be honest, I also found myself wrestling with this question as I was reading this story. That's a legit question. I think we ask that because we know throughout history there have been many people—and even whole societies—that didn't understand certain diseases ,so they just blamed it on demons or the gods. But that's not actually what we see in the Bible. Just read through the Gospels. Clearly Jesus and His followers recognized the difference. If you look at Jesus'

ministry and the ministry of the apostles, they recognized the difference between disease, demon possession and other forms of affliction.

That's why author Tim Keller—a writer I respect so much—calls this “the complexity of evil and suffering.” You see, some people reduce evil and suffering to just physical causes. They say what we need is more medicine or more healthy lifestyles—which we probably do.

Some people reduce evil and suffering to just mental or psychological causes. They say what we need is more therapy or more positive thinking.

Other people reduce it to social causes, saying what we need is more laws and government intervention—or even revolution. Some more religious people reduce evil and suffering to moral causes. The problem is our sin and the guilt and shame that comes with it. So they say what we need is more repentance, prayer and Bible study.

Other people from more superstitious cultures reduce it all to spiritual causes. Evil spirits are the cause of everything. There is a demon behind everything. I got a flat tire last night. It was a demon, right? In more superstitious cultures there are evil spirits behind everything. As a result, we constantly need to fear them or somehow ward them off or constantly cast them out.

But the biblical view of evil and suffering is holistic and multifaceted. In the Bible, all these dimensions of evil and suffering are real and interrelated. That's why we're not out here casting out the coronavirus. There might be some YouTube videos of that, but that is not our biblical response. As Christians, we believe in the power of God and are praying for Almighty God to intervene. We're also thankful that in His grace, He's provided medical doctors and researchers who are working on a vaccine. We follow their wise counsel. All of these different dimensions and layers of evil and suffering are real and interrelated.

I'll never forget when I was a freshman in college and my younger brother—who at the time was in high school—experienced a complete mental breakdown, out of nowhere. I was home at that time and remember the night before that he came to share some weird things with me. My mom was out of town, so I took him downstairs to my dad and we talked with him. Then the next day he drove to school. I'll never forget my phone ringing. For those of you who are Gen Z, we didn't have cell phones. I had a phone with a cord attached to it in my room. I was hyped that I had my own phone. I remember it ringing and it was my brother on the other end of the line.

He was in his car. He had left school in the middle of the day and was racing down the street. I asked him what was wrong and he was speaking frantically over the phone. Then all of a sudden I heard him yelling, “I will not kill myself! I will not kill myself!” I remember saying, “Kevin, what are you talking about? What's going on right now? Hey, here's where I want you to meet me.” I grabbed my dad, we got in the car and raced to meet him.

Then over the next days and months, so much stuff began to unfold. I remember specifically one night when he was just completely gone. He didn't even recognize my parents. Whenever my dad would come near him, he would get loud and belligerent, screaming at the top of his lungs. My dad couldn't come near him, but for some reason he would let me come near him.

I remember one night convincing him to let my dad come into the room. My dad was a man full of faith, a strong Christian. I remember dad coming into the room and lying beside my brother. He laid his hands on him and prayed in the authority of Jesus for God to deliver him. We didn't know what was happening at the time. I don't know how to describe it, but the only thing I can say was that it was almost like I saw something lift off of him—and all of his belligerence just calmed. From that point forward, there were no more loud reactions. He was calm. He wasn't completely healed yet, but he was calm from that point forward.

Over those next several weeks, he ended up being checked into Children's Hospital right here in Washington, DC—into the psychiatric ward of the hospital. I remember as a college student going to class every day, then getting in my car and going to visit my little brother in the hospital. I praise God for the doctors and counselors who were there who worked with him and helped bring healing to him. Praise God, whatever that was, he's not dealing with it anymore.

How much of that was spiritual and how much of that was psychological or physiological? I have no idea. All I know is that in that moment, by God's grace, we had access to a hospital, doctors, medical research and medicine. At the same time we were desperately crying out to God for deliverance, help and intervention.

So listen. All of these dimensions of evil and suffering are real and they are interrelated. From our perspective, we can't always figure out how they are related. But we do know there is a God Who is sovereign and powerful over it all. He is at work and has gifted us with so many ways to deal with evil and suffering.

Now, you might be saying to yourself, "I don't even believe demons exist. Whether it's in the story or whether they were involved in your brother's life, I don't even believe demons exist." I would ask you, "Why not?" You may not believe in God, but listen, if you would say it's possible that God exists, if it's possible that good spiritual beings exist, like God and angels, then why isn't it possible that evil spiritual beings exist? What if the Bible is right and there is a powerful spiritual dimension to the evil and suffering we face in our world and in our personal lives?

Christians from other parts of the world see this so much more clearly than we often do in the West. In fact, this spiritual dimension, these demonic forces, often exploit and intensify all these other forms of evil and suffering. So here's the first point: **Satan wants you and me to live in bondage.** This man in Mark 5 had been so given over to demonic influence that at this point they have full control of his body. If we're not careful, we can look at this extreme example of demon possession and think it has

nothing to do with us. Even though we may not be affected by demons to the same degree as this man, this is the reality: every single one of us is affected by the work of demonic forces. In fact, demons are actively working against all of us right now in all kinds of ways. Listen, demons aren't usually dramatic; that's actually what makes them so dangerous.

I was watching a TV show—I just love spy shows and all that—and this foreign government was attacking a country without any physical violence at all. There were no troops storming across the borders. No, they had enacted a campaign of disinformation and deception. They were operating behind the scenes. In the show, they had set up troll farms which were sending out false information through social media and e controlling world events.

This is exactly how demonic forces tend to work most of the time. The goal is to create a situation where you're in a war, but you don't know it. So they work just like a foreign government, operating behind the scenes, exploiting our pre-existing conditions and our weaknesses. They capitalize on our desires and the lies we believe in order to draw us away from God and drive us into deeper bondage.

Let me give you one quick example from the Bible in Ephesian 4:26-27. Listen to this. The Apostle Paul says, *“Be angry and do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, and give no opportunity to the devil.”* You say, “What does that mean? It means if we're not careful, Satan can wreak havoc through something as common as a grudge. That anger can harden into bitterness that eats away at us and steals our joy. Or it can become inflamed into a rage that wounds and destroys our relationships. Anger can be a basic emotion, but anger can also become an attack of the enemy who doesn't just want to harm or enslave us, but wants to use us to bring harm to others. This is exactly why God warns us in 1 Peter 5:8, *“Be sober-minded”*—stay alert. *“Be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour.”*

Last week our staff was praying in light of everything going on with coronavirus and in the middle of the prayer time—almost out of nowhere—I felt this intense burden. I found myself praying this prayer: “God, please don't let Satan use this time to drive our people into deeper bondage. God, protect our church.”

It's so important to understand that behind all the evil and suffering you deal with, there is an enemy who wants to destroy you. He doesn't just want you to be sick; he wants you to hate God for it. He doesn't just want you to sin; he wants to use your sin to draw you away from God and drive you into deeper bondage. He doesn't just want you to indulge yourself; he wants you to become addicted, and he wants that addiction to grow like a wildfire that destroys your family, your future and your Christian witness.

He doesn't just want you to grieve; he wants to convince you that there's no hope, that life isn't worth living. He doesn't just want you to compare yourself to other people; he wants to make you hate yourself. When you look at yourself in the mirror, when you think about everybody else's life, the enemy

wants you to hate yourself to the point that it drives you to despair and self harm. Satan wants you and me to live in bondage.

2. Jesus came to set you free.

But guess what? Jesus came to set you free. Satan does not have ultimate authority. Satan is not almighty. Jesus came to set you free. Listen to what Mark wrote earlier in his Gospel, in Mark 3:27. There were some people who had gotten it twisted, thinking Jesus was somehow Himself possessed by a demon because of all the spiritual power He demonstrated. Jesus began to say, “That’s illogical.” But then He made this one statement that described His ministry of bringing the Kingdom of God to bear on the kingdoms of this world. Jesus said, *“But no man can enter a strong man’s house and plunder his goods, unless he first binds the strong man. Then indeed he may plunder his house.”*

Jesus is describing His ministry, this rescue mission that He came for. He has entered the domain of darkness. It’s like He broke into the enemy’s house who’s holding all of us hostage through deception and temptation and demonic power in all these different ways. Jesus comes in, then in order to free us He has to demonstrate His power and authority over the enemy. This is exactly what we see happening in this man’s life in Mark 5. Beginning in verse six, it says:

⁶ And when he saw Jesus from afar, he ran and fell down before him. ⁷ And crying out with a loud voice, he said, “What have you to do with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I adjure you by God, do not torment me.”

In other words, he’s saying, “Swear to God that You won’t torment me.” We know as we read further that these are the demons speaking through this man. Have you ever seen somebody picking on a little boy, then that boy’s big brother shows up? I’ve seen this before.

I’m about to date myself, but do you remember that episode of “Fresh Prince” when he was talking crazy on the phone? Then all of a sudden the doorbell rings and Evander Holyfield shows up? That’s what’s happening right here. The demons have been wreaking havoc and flexing on this dude, then Jesus shows up and the demons begin to panic. Why? Because Jesus shows up and the demons know Who Jesus is. We see this over and over again in Mark’s Gospel. The crowds don’t fully understand Who Jesus is yet. The disciples don’t fully understand Who Jesus is yet. But the demons tremble, because they know.

That’s why they call Him “Jesus, Son of the Most High God.” It was a way in that culture of identifying Jesus with God Himself, the one true God, the God Who has authority and Who flexes on all the other so-called gods. So the demons are panicking. Verse eight says, *“For he was saying to him, ‘Come out of the man, you unclean spirit!’”* This is not an exorcism. There are no elaborate words, no complicated rituals or processes. Jesus simply speaks.

In Mark 4, He speaks, and the wind and waves obey Him. In Mark 7, He speaks, and deaf ears and mute mouths are restored to their intended design. Now once again, He simply speaks and demons

start freaking out. This seems so weird to us in this culture, but brothers and sisters watching all over the world understand this. When we experience someone suffering from demonization, we speak the word of Jesus—the gospel. We don't have to do all this crazy stuff. We speak the words of the gospel and pray in the authority of Jesus for God to deliver them.

Jesus asks in Mark 5:9, *“What is your name?”* The demon replies, *“My name is Legion, for we are many.”* In the Roman empire, a legion was the largest troop unit in the Roman army—somewhere between 5,000-6,000 soldiers. The point isn't the precise number of demons; the point is that just like the Roman Empire had invaded and oppressed Palestine, demonic forces have invaded this world and were oppressing this man.

At first, it seems like the demon is trying to flex on Jesus, like, “Jesus, don't start nothing You can't finish.” But keep reading. If you're new to the Bible and this whole demon thing is weird to begin with, spoiler alert: it's about to get even weirder. In verse ten, this demon begged Jesus earnestly through this man *“not to send them out of the country.”*

11 Now a great herd of pigs was feeding there on the hillside, 12 and they begged him, saying, “Send us to the pigs; let us enter them.” 13 So he gave them permission. And the unclean spirits came out and entered the pigs; and the herd, numbering about two thousand, rushed down the steep bank into the sea and drowned in the sea.

What in the world is going on here? Can I be honest? I have no idea. First of all, why in the world is Jesus negotiating with demons? Second, why in the world did the demons cause the pigs to spaz out and jump off a cliff? Third, demons can hijack bodies? This is problematic.

I remember coming home late one night and there were six deer just standing outside my door. They were not moving at all. They were like, “We were here before you.” They would not move. I was stomping my feet. I was yelling at them. I had to break into my house another way and was thinking they probably had some demons in them.

I think there's at least two things going on here. I don't fully understand exactly what's going on. We don't have the knowledge yet to fully understand how demons relate to bodies and all that stuff, but there are two things that seem clear to me. One, Matthew, one of the other Gospel writers, gives us a helpful detail in Matthew 8:29 where the demons say, *“Have you come here to torment us...”*—here's the key phrase—*...before the time?* In other words, the time had not come yet for final judgment. There is a day when Jesus is going to bind Satan and all demonic powers forever. He will bring the final judgment, but it wasn't that time yet. So in one sense, maybe Jesus is acknowledging that. “All right, I'm going to give you a pass for now,” so He cast them into the pigs.

Secondly, think about this. The entire herd of 2,000 pigs just drowned in the sea. This was the livelihood for these townspeople. Here's the point: Jesus disrupted an entire industry just to rescue one person. In a sense, what Jesus communicates here is that the life of one individual who's been made in the

image of God is worth more than all the capital assets we might care so much about. Jesus doesn't just see a demon-possessed man; He sees a man who's been made in the image of God. He sees a man wrestling with deep pain and bondage—and He steps in.

Let me show you how amazing this is. There's this theme of uncleanness throughout this story in Mark 5. The Gentiles—people who were not of Jewish descent—were unclean by Jewish standards. This whole thing is happening in a Gentile region which is clear by the fact that these people were herding pigs which were unclean animals. In verse two, this man was possessed by an unclean spirit. He was living in the tombs which Jews saw as an unclean place. Why? Because the Mosaic law was clear that if you came into contact with a dead body—or anything that has touched a dead body—you became unclean.

Unclean means contaminated. Unclean means it's not suitable to be in the presence of God. So Jesus goes to an unclean region, meets an unclean man with an unclean spirit living among unclean tombs. Here's the point. This is a place where the presence of God should not be. It's unclean. And the reality is that all of us are unclean according to God's standards.

Listen. Wherever you're watching from right now, whoever you are, this is true of every single one of us. We might see ourselves as good, moral people—righteous and clean—according to our own standard or in comparison to other people. But every single one of us is unclean according to God's standards. Each one of us has violated God's will and become contaminated by sin. We are no longer suitable to be in the presence of God. We are cut off from relationship with God. Because we've rebelled against Him, we deserve His judgment.

But the good news of the gospel is that Jesus comes to unclean people in unclean places. Jesus sets people free and makes us clean. In all of the dirt and the mess—the sin and bondage that eats us away from the inside out and makes its way into our lives—Jesus shows up. The presence of God in the flesh comes to us and announces, "I've come to set you free."

You see, the gospel is the good news, not only that Jesus came to forgive you, but the gospel is the good news that He came to free you. He came and lived a perfectly righteous life to fulfill all of God's standards. You can't do that. I can't do that. Then He allowed Himself to be killed on the cross, paying the price for our sin as a sacrifice in our place.

Jesus switched places with this man.

You see, in Mark 5, this man is crying out. He's in the tombs. But at the end of the Gospel of Mark—and this is the good news of the gospel—we see Jesus as the One taking our sin and taking the wrath of God. Jesus is the One crying out on the cross. He isn't just among the tombs—He allows Himself to be placed in a tomb. Instead of the demons trembling, the demons are probably celebrating, rejoicing and watching the game film of their victory—at least for three days. Then Jesus, the Son of the Most High God, rises from the dead, demonstrating His power over Satan, sin and death.

This Jesus wants you to be free. You say, “How do I find this freedom? How do I experience this freedom?” Before we’re done, I’m going to give you an opportunity to receive this freedom directly from Jesus Himself. It starts with one scary but very simple step. It’s right here in the beginning of the story. How do I find freedom? How do I experience this freedom? Let me read verse two from the Christian Standard Bible translation: *“As soon as [Jesus] got out of the boat, a man with an unclean spirit came out of the tombs.”*

Listen, your freedom starts with one very scary but very simple step. Come out, and bringing your condition, your bondage, out into the open. You will never find freedom in the dark. You will only find freedom in the light. You have to come out of hiding. You have to resist the lies and the shame and the paralyzing fear of what others might think of you. You have to fight against the pride that keeps you from being honest about how deep your sin and struggles go. You have to allow some people you trust to see those sinful and broken places in your life.

I’m a pretty skinny dude and have been all my life. When I got married, whenever I would take off my shirt, I would tighten up so she would think I had a six pack. I know; it’s weird. I don’t even know why I was doing it. We were already married. She already said, “I do.” She was locked in. But I guess I was embarrassed for her to see me, so I would tighten up every single time. The problem is, I slipped one day and she caught me. She’s like, “Whoa. What is that?” We laugh about that now. I still do at times. It’s so crazy.

But here’s the thing. Every single one of us does this. We have these issues that keep us in bondage. I’m not talking about letting it loose for everybody in the world to see; I’m talking about how destructive and crazy it is for us to try to hide those things from the people who love us the most. It’s exhausting. Have you ever tried to tighten up your abs for an extraordinarily long period of time? It is exhausting and begins to be painful to the point that you can’t do it anymore. Some of us are right there at that brink.

What I believe God is inviting you to do is just be honest and let some people see the reality, the true condition. Others don’t know that your drinking has gotten out of hand. They know you’re down sometimes, but they don’t know how dark it really gets when you’re alone. They don’t know how bad your marriage really is. They don’t know how in debt you are or how bad the gambling addiction has gotten, as well as the gripping anxiety you feel from that.

We have to bring it into the light. Some of us need a good friend or a professional counselor. Some of us might need medicine. Some of us need to confess our sin and get some accountability. But here’s what we all need: every single one of us watching right now, need the presence and power of Jesus. We need His presence and power in our lives, because Jesus is the fount of every blessing. Every good and perfect gift comes from Him (James 1:17). At the bottom of all of our challenges, we need to be set free by the presence and power of Jesus.

3. People need to hear your story.

Satan wants you to live in bondage. Today, right now, in the midst of this social distancing with all the storm swirling around us, he wants you to live in bondage. Jesus came to set you free and if you experience the liberating grace of God in your life, then here's the final point: people need to hear your story. Look at Mark 5:14:

¹⁴ The herdsmen fled and told it in the city and in the country. And people came to see what it was that had happened. ¹⁵ And they came to Jesus and saw the demon-possessed man, the one who had had the legion.

I love this, because it's a picture of the transformational power of God's grace. The man goes from crying out, naked and cutting himself in verse five to "*sitting there, clothed and in his right mind.*" What comes to mind involves a plush bathrobe with this guy just sitting there chilling with Jesus. This is a picture of the power of the transformational grace of God in the life of someone who's been set free. The storm was raging, then the storm ceases for him.

Because the people saw the power of almighty God right in front of them, they're afraid.

¹⁶ And those who had seen it described to them what had happened to the demon-possessed man and to the pigs. ¹⁷ And they began to beg Jesus to depart from their region. ¹⁸ As he was getting into the boat, the man who had been possessed with demons begged him that he might be with him.

This is the deepest desire of every person who has been rescued by Jesus. We want to be with Him. As we've been reading throughout the Psalms, we want to commune with the Savior Who has set us free. But we read this in verse 19:

¹⁹ And he did not permit him but said to him, "Go home to your friends and tell them how much the Lord has done for you, and how he has had mercy on you."

Sometimes Jesus calls us to move from where we are, but sometimes He calls us to minister right where we are.

²⁰ And he went away and began to proclaim in the Decapolis how much Jesus had done for him, and everyone marveled.

If you've experienced the liberating grace of Jesus, then people need to hear your story. One of the ways we tell our story is through baptism. We obviously can't do that right now with social distancing, but if you've made a decision to follow Jesus and you haven't been baptized yet as a profession of your faith, when we gather again here at our campuses or in your local church, there will be an opportunity for you to tell your story of transformational grace through baptism.

There are so many other ways to share your story. Right now the world is at your fingertips online through social media. In preparation for Easter, we're going to give you an opportunity to tell your story of what God has done for you and how much mercy He's had on you. We're going to give you an

opportunity to upload a video that shares that story and I want to give you an opportunity to do a test run even now.

Right now, wherever you are, you can go to the McLean Bible Church Facebook page or on our Instagram account and write in the comments. You can, in just a few sentences, , like a rough draft, write out what you want to proclaim as we celebrate the resurrection of Jesus for Easter. Just say, “Jesus set me free from _____.” People need to hear your story.

I’m standing up here today because He set me free from the grinding craving for selfish ambition in my life. All I wanted was to be popular, to be glorified and exalted. It got to the point that whenever I saw somebody else succeeding, it would drive me into despair. Jesus reminded me even this morning that I don’t have to earn status before people, because I’ve already been given status before Him through what He has done for me. I am a son of God. Jesus has set me free from an addiction to pornography. I was constantly hiding in the dark, watching pornography, gratifying myself sexually in ways that were doing damage to my own heart and damage to my relationship with God. You might not believe it’s possible, but I’m telling you—He set me free. People need to hear your story.

I want to give us a moment to pray, then we’re going to respond by celebrating the power of Jesus in our lives. Right where you are, I want to invite you to pray in one of two ways. First of all, if you can pray this prayer in genuine faith, I want you to pray this: “Jesus, please set me free from _____.” Wherever you’re watching from right now, I want you to open your hands or lift your hands as a sign of surrender. It might be weird. Your roommates might be around, your kids might be around. That’s okay; you can explain it later. Just lift your hands or open your hands, then begin to pray, “Jesus, please set me free from _____.” Maybe it’s from the penalty of your sin from which you need to be saved and forgiven. You need confidence and assurance that you will go to heaven after you die. Jesus said, “Everyone who calls upon My name, the name of the Lord, will be saved” (Romans 10:9-13). If you trust in Jesus, that He died in your place for your sins and rose from the grave, then just pray right now. “Jesus, please set me free from sin.”

If you’re in Christ, you may still have struggles, but you’ve already been set free, so you just need help learning how to live out that freedom that’s already been accomplished for you in Jesus. So I want to invite you to pray, “Jesus, thank You for setting me free from _____.” Here’s the reality. Colossians 2:15 says, “[God] *disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them in [Jesus].*” So just take a minute and say, “Jesus, thank You for setting me free from _____.” Take a minute between you and God in prayer.



You can keep praying, even as I pray.

O Father, we come before You, the great Almighty God. Demons do not have authority over You. Our bondage has power over us, but it does not have power over You. So in the name of Jesus, I pray for

every single person watching this right now, that You would break the bondage they've been experiencing in their life through the power of Jesus Christ and the power of Your Holy Spirit.

O God, I thank You that You're not working through the airwaves right now. No, You are right there in the room with the people who are watching and listening to this. Father, set them free. And for those of us who have been set free, thank You for turning our mourning into dancing. Thank You for turning our bondage into freedom. Thank You, Lord, for turning our pain into praise. Father, we commit to proclaiming the goodness, power and mercy of Your name for the rest of our days. We pray this in the matchless and powerful name of Jesus. Amen.

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All Scriptures are quoted directly from the English Standard Version unless otherwise noted.

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