

The power of a changed life

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In Mark 5 we find a dramatic story from the life of Jesus. He and his disciples have just survived a life-threatening storm on the Sea of Galilee. At one point in their journey the storm had gotten so bad that even the professional fishermen amongst the disciples feared that they would die. Jesus had rebuked the wind and the sea and all had grown quiet and calm. Even His disciples, who had by this time seen a number of miracles, had been left in a state of fear and awe.

It is at this point that we begin the story found in Mark 5:1-20.

Immediately as Jesus and His disciples stepped out of the boat onto the shore, they were confronted by a man who seemed to have lost his mind. The story tells us that this man lived amongst the tombs and had an unclean spirit. He was so strong that no one could bind him, not even with chains. No one could restrain him. Night and day he was continually screaming and shrieking and cutting himself with stones.

When this man saw Jesus, he ran to Jesus and fell at his feet. Jesus commanded the unclean spirit to come out of the man. Crying out to Jesus 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.”* The man had many unclean spirits. Even though the spirits were evil, they knew exactly who Jesus was and humbled themselves before His authority. In the end Jesus cast the unclean spirits out of the man and into a herd of pigs, which then rushed down the bank into the sea and drowned. The herdsmen then fled to the city and told what had happened.

When the town’s people came out to see they found the man, *“sitting there, clothed and in his right mind.”* The man’s life had been dramatically changed in ways that no one could have ever imagined. As Jesus departed, the man begged to go with Jesus, but Jesus did not permit him to go with them.

But Jesus 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.”* The story then concludes telling us that the man went to the surrounding cities proclaiming what Jesus had done for him, and everyone marveled.

What an amazing story of the power of Christ to change a life and the power that a changed life has to prepare the way for others to be changed.

God’s changing of a life was not a one-time event. We see it in the life of Matthew, the wealthy tax collector who worked for the Romans and who took excessive taxes from his own people for the sake of his own gain and pleasure. When confronted by Jesus, Matthew left it all behind to follow Him (Matthew 9:9-13).

We see it in the life of Paul, who had been a persecutor of Christians until he came face to face with Christ on the road to Damascus. He then became a believer in Christ and would eventually write much of the New Testament (Acts 9:1-19).

In John 4, we see the woman who talks with Jesus at the well. She was a woman of ill-repute, and had had five husbands and was now living with another man. As she came to know who Jesus was she believed. She returned to her town and told others. Many people from her town believed because of her testimony. Jesus stayed with them and many more came to believe in Jesus. The story ends with these words, *“They said to the woman, ‘It is no longer because of what you said that we believe, for we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this is indeed the Savior of the world.’”*

This is the goal. That our changed lives would give testimony to the power of Jesus and prepare the way for many other lives to be changed as well.

Even in our congregation we have stories of people who were converted from Satan worship, Islam, Hinduism, Atheism and much more. The power of Jesus Christ to change lives continues to work in our world today. Do you believe it?

- Out of all the people who you know, who would be the last one you would ever think would choose to follow Jesus Christ?
- Do you believe that God is big enough to change that person?
- What is one area of your life that needs to be changed, that has not yet been changed?
- Do you believe that God is big enough to bring about that change in your life?

Your answers to these questions will greatly affect how you live your life. If we believe that God is big enough to change our lives, then we will run to Him, submit to Him, trust in Him, call out to Him, obey Him, as we seek for Him to accomplish change in us. If we do not believe that God has the power to change us, then we will either continue to tolerate and be enslaved by our sin and our faults, or we will turn to self-help and insufficient strategies of the world as we search for a way to change ourselves.

When a person becomes a believer and follower of Jesus Christ, scripture tells us of multiple changes that occur in that individual's life. They are changed from guilty to innocent, wicked to righteous, dead in sin to alive in Christ, from a life of futility to a life of purpose, from despair to hope, from uncertainty to eternal security, from being separated from God by sin to now having an open invitation to the throne of God, at any time. One who was at enmity with God has now been reconciled to God. Those who were bitter are now able to forgive. The proud have now been made humble.

In Jesus' words we see that a life changed by the gospel could lead to the change of others. We see evidence of this in Matthew 5:14-16:

“You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.”

Like the story of the man that was delivered from the unclean spirits, a changed life is a tool in the hand of God as He changes the lives of others in the world around us. A changed life gives testimony to the grace of God and prepares the way for the spoken gospel to penetrate the heart of man.

But what about Christians whose lives never really changed after they became believers? One of two truths apply. One is that they were changed by Christ but they are not walking in it. They have turned away from Christ and are now troubled by the conviction of sin and the discipline of God that promises to bring them back. The second possibility is that the person was never in the faith in the first place.

What about those who see one's changed life but still refuse to be saved? There are times that we present the gospel, live the gospel and pray for one to come to faith in Jesus Christ. As we see in scripture some will finally believe (Paul, Philippian jailer, Ethiopian eunuch). At the same time, even in the life of Christ there were those who came face to face with the truth and never believed (the rich young ruler, the Pharisees and the second thief on the cross). We do not know the final outcome of every person, so we must ask God for perseverance as we continue to walk by faith, praying, caring and sharing for others.

For those of us who have truly put their faith in Christ and been born again, we must be a people of holy imagination. A people who can picture a reality where lives, cities and countries are changed. That is why we pray. At times we do not know God's will and do not know what will transpire in the future, but we believe with all of our hearts in our God who changes the hearts of man.

If we do not believe that God has the power to bring salvation to even the hardest of hearts, then we will enter our homes and workplaces no longer seeking to be a light in the darkness. We will live life with the world's priorities, totally ignoring the call that Christ has placed on our lives to reconcile people to Him. Without the belief that God can change lives, we will no longer seek to make an eternal difference. We will no longer think about praying for the salvation of others. We will no longer seek to care for the non-believers around us. We will no longer look for opportunities to share the truths of the gospel to others who need Christ.

As we look back to the story that we began with, we see two different responses to the power of Christ. The man who had been freed from the evil spirits longed to go with Jesus. The crowds who came from the city and saw what Christ had done begged Christ to leave. Today which are we? As we consider the possibility of change in our lives, do we submit our hearts and our wills to Christ, longing for His work in our lives, or do we turn away, unchanged, longing to be the masters of our own lives?

Are you willing to be changed? Are you willing to give testimony to what God continues to do in your life? This submission of spirit ushers in God's work in us. If we are not open to God's changing work in our lives, our hardness of heart will limit any further change in our lives.

Let us pray for a holy discontentment. A contentment in Christ for the change that He has brought in our lives, but at the same time longing for more of His changing power, to make us holy as we live moment by moment. We see in scripture that it is impossible to come into the presence of God and walk away unchanged. As we come into His presence we will be made more like Him.

When someone is reconciled to God, it changes them. That is the biblical example that we see. We have been changed, but we are also continually being changed. May we each continue to submit to Christ's work in our lives and draw near to Him on a daily basis. As we are changed, He will use our testimony to prepare the hearts of others to receive the gospel of Jesus Christ.