

Don't Mourn the Pig!

A Life Can Change

Mark 5:1-20

In the first week of our study on Mark 5:1-20, we looked at this truth: **'what God is up to is more important than anything we can lose or gain.'** God is in the business of saving souls. God is in the business of purity, honor, what is right, truth, love, faithfulness, humanity experiencing His presence and provision, freedom from the tyranny of evil, a good future, and so much more. But, as we also see, there is a dark side to creation that wages war against God, and the casualty is creation. Last week, we dove into scripture and **looked at a very real war that is raging all around us: a spiritual war.**

There is a war for our souls. There is a war to tear down the Christian's testimony with the intent to make us look like fools, hypocrites, and liars. That war is fueled by the very enemy of God.

Revelations 12:11 says, "And they have defeated him [Satan] by the blood of the Lamb and by their testimony. And they did not love their lives so much that they were afraid to die." We are overcomers to sin and the enemy of God, because of the blood that Jesus shed upon the cross. That blood is what God sees when He looks at us. It cleanses us and leaves us spotless. God saw our sin upon Jesus at the cross, and now God sees Jesus's righteousness upon us instead of our sinfulness. Our testimony is the story of what Christ has done for us and through us. It is the story of how He changed us intellectually, physically, emotionally, willfully, and spiritually.

The blood that was shed represents Christ's promise of salvation, healing, and the freedom it brings. The demoniac in our story experienced these things. This man was put outside the city. He was hostile and violent because of his evil nature. He was not worthy of being part of them. Something had to happen; there needed to be a change for him to be part of them.

It's the same for us with the kingdom of God due to our sinful nature. We were enemies to it, unworthy of it, and all that it offered. We didn't see necessarily how our sin was hostile towards God; it had control over us.

But, there was something that woke us to the realization that we needed saving. There was something that caused us to begin to see the depravity, the devastation of our sin and the need to be saved from it. We saw a need to be justified.

Romans 3:20 says, "For by works of the law no human being will be justified in his sight, since through the law comes knowledge of sin." The law of God shows us we fall short of the perfect standard of the law.

Every people group has a lawful-type system. And within that lawful-type system there is judgment. All of those systems are a *shadow* of the real lawful system, God's lawful system. The difference is that God's lawful system is perfect in type and perfect in execution. It is 100% just. The Creator-God is author of what is right and wrong within that law. As creation, we must live within that lawful system. We have broken the law, and since we have chosen to go outside that perfect system, we deserve judgment.

For some, we think we are pretty good. But, to break the law is to break the law. To be mostly good is just that, mostly good. What is left beyond the mostly? ...the not so good of us. Scripture tells us that if we break the law in one little way, we have broken the whole law. Why? Because the standard is absolute holiness, complete perfection. Anything less deserves judgment.

That makes God unfair. Does it? Does it really make God unfair? He created us perfect and gave us everything we needed to live a satisfied life. Instead, we sinned. We brought devastation upon His creation. We brought devastation upon the relationship He wanted with His creation. We broke it. The unfair part is that He chose to go to the cross for us, take our punishment, give us His right standing before God so that you and I can be declared not guilty, and have the blessing of eternal life with God. That is unfair. That's grace. It's unfair that He puts up with us one minute praising Him and the next minute tearing down His creation or thinking again we know better than Him. He does that because of His immense love for us. He does that because He is not a selfish god, but wants to share all that is truly good with us.

God wants to justify us. To justify something as Paul uses it, is to legally declare something righteous. To be justified of our sin, God is declaring

that our sin no longer has a standing over us. We are no longer eternally condemned due to our sin. It's just-if-ied never sinned. That is how God legally sees me, pure and holy. It's like a covering over me. This is our new position in Christ—free from condemnation.

Listen to these verses from Romans 5:

Verse 8 "But God showed his great love for us by sending Christ to die for us while we were still sinners."

Verse 12 "When Adam sinned, sin entered the world. Adam's sin brought death, so death spread to everyone, for everyone sinned."

Verse 20 "So just as sin ruled over all people and brought them to death, now God's wonderful grace rules instead, giving us right standing with God and resulting in eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord." It is an act that is of God. He calls us to our need for Him by revealing the detriment of our sin, we respond to it by accepting the gracious act of giving us His righteousness. He therefore responds to us accepting His gracious act by declaring us at that moment righteous, perfect and holy. By the way, He can do that because Jesus lived a perfect life in perfect obedience to God the Father, and that is the righteousness that God gives us, Jesus's righteousness. Therefore, we have a legally right standing before God.

Romans 5:1 says, "Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ." We, by faith, trust that Jesus took our sin and forgave us of our debt, and in turn God fills up our bank account with a never ending supply of grace, a favor we didn't earn, but was given to us. A favor that says you are My child forever. You never need to be afraid to come to me. You will be completely restored. I will love you as a good father loves and grows His children. You will be part of My kingdom forever. You will receive the inheritance of eternal life that I have promised.

This transaction is a moment in time when we are made new creatures. We are born-again. We are given new life. We are given a new position before God, and a new name. No longer outcast, but child. No longer sinner, but saint. As spiritual new born babies we need to grow.

In John 3, Nicodemus is having a conversation with Jesus and he wants to know how to be born again. Jesus answered, "Humans can reproduce only human life, but the Holy Spirit gives birth to spiritual life. So don't be surprised when I say, 'You must be born again.' The wind blows wherever

it wants. Just as you can hear the wind but can't tell where it comes from or where it is going, so you can't explain how people are born of the Spirit." And, then a little later Jesus said, "the Son of Man must be lifted up, so that everyone who believes in him will have eternal life." Jesus said to be born again, we must believe.

2 Corinthians 5:17 puts it this way speaking of the believer, "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!" We are a new creation. The 'therefore' refers to the previous verses that tell us that we have died with Christ, we no longer have worldly lives, but have spiritual lives.

Romans 6:14 puts it this way, "walk in the newness of life." That walking in the newness of life is what comes from us being justified. We are talking about a change that happens at salvation.

Can a man change? By the power of God, absolutely YES! When God gives new life to an individual, that individual can change. Why? Because their old nature is being put to death, and they have been awakened to the things of God.

That husband that seems like he will never change can change. That wife that will never change can change. That kid who constantly rebels can change. That thief can change. That murderer can change. If the power of God's salvation has come on them, they can change. The Spirit of God will begin to work on them. This is why we must reflect and preach Christ to all...the good, indifferent, and the bad.

This morning I want us to see that a life can truly change when God is involved. Just as when the demoniac was confronted by Jesus, when a person is confronted by Jesus and believes in Him turning from their sin and turning to the things of God, that person can change. So, may we never give up. May we never think someone is too far from saving.

There may even be someone today listening that thinks they are just out of reach of saving. It's the lie of the enemy of God to keep you in disbelief. It's the lie of Satan, because he doesn't want you to taste and see that the Lord is good. In fact, I dare to say that God is calling you. That is why you are hearing this. He is opening up the opportunity for you to come to Him

and experience the joy of salvation and the hope of a future filled with peace.

In just a few moments I want to share a couple stories of some very changed lives. They are stories that echo the stories of millions of people over the centuries. They are stories that really have no other explanation than something bigger than themselves.

But, first, I want us to catch this point. When we encounter the saving grace of Jesus, we will change because it is part of the story of God redeeming mankind.

But, you may be thinking “that is great and wonderful, God has declared you positionally free, but my husband still acts like...,my wife still does..., my kid still..., that guy-that woman still does _____.” It is important for us to have a basic understanding of two theological terms: justification and sanctification so we can understand of the Christian life, how to walk through life with them, and the hope that is there.

We looked at justification, let's look at this 5th theological term. Sanctification is tied to the word 'saint'. It means to be set apart. As believers, we have been set apart from the power of sin over us, to being a people that honor, worship, and serve God. We have been set aside to do good works. It begins when we are justified. It starts there. It is the process of growing to be more like Christ, and to further ourselves from sin. It's important in this to note we are not defeated by sin. Scripture is clear that when we know Christ, sin's power over us is broken. John 8:36 says, “if the Son has set you free, you are free indeed.” We now choose to serve God. When we do not, we are unhappy, tension-filled, and grief stricken and it spills out in our relationships.

Sanctification is the process where God works in us to free us more and more from sin and to make us more and more to reflect who Christ is. But, there is a caveat. Justification is all a work of God. Sanctification is our teaming up with God. There are many action words spoken to the individual in the NT of what our role is. Words such as strive, put off, flee, serve, gain knowledge, fix our eyes upon Christ, have the same attitude as Christ, and way more.

To misunderstand sanctification for the believer can breed two things: a nasty sense of false religion called legalism or an overactive abuse of God's grace.

Legalism is a doctrinal position emphasizing a system of rules and regulations for achieving both salvation and spiritual growth. It leads directly to bondage. It leads directly to slavery of the self. It sets up a standard that no one on this earth can attain. Even God Himself gives people room to grow in their faith. Legalism is about what you do wrong, and not about God's grace. It creates a false humility and drives a performance attitude, but no inner change. It moves towards what I can do, *instead of* what God did. It is easy to understand how we can come to this conclusion though...look at Matthew 5:48 "Be perfect as God is perfect", 1 John 3:6 "No one who is born of God keeps on sinning."

We aren't going to be perfect this side of heaven. God's standard being so high points to the beauty of His saving grace, His unmerited favor upon us. Favor that was given to us only out of His everlasting, never-ending love for us. So, why don't we just go on sinning and do what makes us feel good since we are going to be made perfect when Jesus comes back?

The second misunderstanding of sanctification can lead us to abuse of grace, living a promiscuous life of complacency. We think it is God's responsibility to fix us, so we do nothing to pursue holiness (Heb 12:14), we just live as we want and absorb grace. So, why not live this way? Because this leads to heresy. It leads to the false doctrine that "all roads lead to God". Jesus was clear, there is only ONE Truth and ONE Way and it is through Him.

Paul also answers this for us in Romans 6 when he asks the question, "Should I go on sinning so grace will increase?" He says emphatically, "NO!" Instead, we are to consider ourselves dead to sin, and alive to God. We are to not let sin reign in our bodies, but instead use our bodies as instruments of righteousness. In other words, pour yourself into the things of God and the relationship with God. Study and learn Scripture. Pray regularly with God. Love others by serving them. Share the gospel so the seeds of faith may spread and grow.

This process of 'working out our salvation' as Paul puts it, is just that, a process. It's a process of ups and downs, failures and successes, movement forward and slipping backwards. That is why Paul says, "I press on toward the goal." Let God's grace cover you, carry you, and move you forward into His likeness.

One of the greatest ways God shows us grace is through disciplining us. It is one of the greatest ways the Spirit of God grows us. Hebrews 12 tells us that is one of the ways He actually reveals His love and care for us. As well, it actually is good for us and there is a blessing that comes from it. The Spirit of God grows us up. He ignites the process. And as we respond to the process, He continues to fuel that fire of growth. He puts the seed of God's Word in front of us, and as we apply it, it grows in us. We gain understanding. We begin to see His will for us. We begin to know Him more. We change into His likeness. This is the idea of Romans 12:1 and 2. We give our whole self as a sacrifice to God. We turn from copying the behaviors and customs of this world. He transforms us by changing how we used to think into a new way of thinking and through that we learn to know God's will and see it take shape in our life.

As we mature in Christ, outward sins will begin to be less noticeable. That is why sometimes it is why we think "so and so has it together" or "so and so has a perfect life." NO THEY DON'T!!!! The struggle of sin becomes more of inward sin than outward sin. Maybe they have the discipline of body and mind to refrain from the sin others so easily see, but what about the sin of attitude and motive? Sin of pride, speech, thoughts when no one is looking, lack of courage and faith, lack of zeal for God or loving their neighbor, or lack of sharing the gospel, and more. This is why as believers we never, and I repeat never can stop reflecting upon the purity of our lives and the movement of sanctification. We can never fall into the trap of pride that says "We have arrived." For then we will have the pride of Satan. May we always live in humility that says "if it weren't for Jesus..." In doing this, we will have compassion for the sinner. We will have compassion for the new born Christian. We will understand us and where we came from. And, in doing this, we can have compassion for other saints who are sinning.

There is, however, another aspect of sanctification that I haven't mentioned. It is the reason why the church being unable to meet together is so devastating. Sanctification in the NT is also a corporate process.

Here is what I mean: it happens in community, it also happens when the church comes together. Heb 10:24-25 tells us "Let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near." You and I need to meet together in worship, in study, in service to God and others because it is part of the process of sanctification.

How do we grow in our sanctification? Prayer, study, service, fellowship, and sharing. It really is that basic.

You might ask "when is the work of sanctification completed?" The work of sanctification isn't completed until Christ returns. There seems to be three stages to sanctification: 1) beginning at justification...we are created as new creatures with a love for honoring God and a growing disgust for sin; 2) as live out the rest of our life we grow in sanctification; and 3) It is completed when we die and Jesus come back...at His coming we receive our new resurrection bodies when we will fully bear the restored image of God.

Sanctification is a process. It's important for us to remember that justification and sanctification are two different theological ideas. But, it's also important to remember that when God sees us as changed, we are to change, with His working in our life, work ourselves to living out that change. Why? Because we want to give gratitude, honor, reveal our love, and reap reward.

In Christ we can change. I would like to share some stories of a couple people who have changed.

The first is a guy who hated Christians. He went looking for Christians to either throw them in jail or to have them killed. One day, Jesus confronted Him and asked why He was persecuting Him. From that day forward, His life was changed from being a murderer of Christians to one who was beaten nearly to death, stoned nearly to death, and worked hard to share the gospel message with all he came into contact with. Paul was willing to give his life so that others could learn of the saving grace of God.

The second guy is a lady was a lady in a nazi camp because of saving people. "It was at a church service in Munich that I saw him, a former S.S.

man who had stood guard at the shower room door in the processing center at Ravensbruck. He was the first of our actual jailers that I had seen since that time. And suddenly it was all there – the roomful of mocking men, the heaps of clothing, Betsie's pain-blanching face.

He came up to me as the church was emptying, beaming and bowing. “How grateful I am for your message, Fraulein.” He said. “To think that, as you say, He has washed my sins away!” His hand was thrust out to shake mine. And I, who had preached so often to the people in Bloemendaal the need to forgive, kept my hand at my side.

Even as the angry, vengeful thoughts boiled through me, I saw the sin of them. Jesus Christ had died for this man; was I going to ask for more? Lord Jesus, I prayed, forgive me and help me to forgive him. I tried to smile, I struggled to raise my hand. I could not. I felt nothing, not the slightest spark of warmth or charity. And so again I breathed a silent prayer. Jesus, I prayed, I cannot forgive him. Give me Your forgiveness.

As I took his hand the most incredible thing happened. From my shoulder along my arm and through my hand a current seemed to pass from me to him, while into my heart sprang a love for this stranger that almost overwhelmed me. And so I discovered that it is not on our forgiveness any more than on our goodness that the world's healing hinges, but on His. When He tells us to love our enemies, He gives, along with the command, the love itself.”

Corrie Ten Boom was face to face with someone who in the midst of suffering would have thought could never change. He did.

The last is a story of the five missionaries to the Auca Indians in 1956. They were slain and left for dead. All they wanted was for these people that were known for killing each other and anyone that came to them from the outside to know of the love of Christ. The missionaries were received for a couple days and then killed. Why is this story so amazing? One of the now widows and a sister of one of the men felt the call of God to reach these people. A short time later, through the working of God, they were able to go to the tribe and share the gospel message. Those that murdered these men came to a saving knowledge of Christ. They were killers. They not only killed those on the outside, but they killed those on the inside of the tribe. They were now saints. As they grew in the Lord,

they began to take the message of hope to the surrounding tribes and helping to meet their needs. They went from ruled by fear, to ruled by love.

In another twist to this story of what should be revenge and absolute anger and hatred, Steve Saint, a then 5 year old boy hearing of his father's death, at age 9 began to connect with this tribe and his very children later would call the man who killed his dad, grandfather. God had redeemed a relationship that should have been fueled by anger.

I encourage you to watch the concert and then the interview that speaks of this life event, this amazing story of redemption and grace. I put the links down below this video. It was a life challenging and changing message for me.

You and I have a story. There are those of us who think God cannot change us or redeem our situation. That is what God is in the business of doing. If God can change them, He can change us. Don't mourn the pigs, instead be about what God is up to.

Read Mark 5:15, 18-20. Jesus told the man to go, because he had a story to tell. That is what we are told to do. Matthew 28:19-20 tells us to 'go' and make disciples.

Concert video

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7QHyYzh_pHk

Concert interview

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=C9z6oK3Y-zM>

Another interview

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6AnomA1dyQI>