

Real change you can believe in – Confronting Evil
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Introduction:

Unless you've been living under a rock for the last few months, you know that the Presidential Election is right around the corner, and the nominees are busy jockeying for position. And you hear each candidate promising change, promising a better future, and a better life for America. Let me ask you, though, do you really believe there will be any real change in Washington anytime soon? I mean, every election we hear promise after promise, but the idea of the politics of this country actually changing seems a fleeting hope!

Here's the problem. The problem is that governments are controlled by people. And people make mistakes. Men are weak, and men are sinners. So, whenever we talk about change in human standards, we seem to come up short. That is not to say that men can't do anything positive at all, but politics can never totally make every man's life better. When you make life better for one person, you may be making life more difficult for another person. So often, politicians have to compromise so much in order to get something that by the end, nothing has really changed.

But I want to tell you that there is someone who can bring about real change. He can bring about change in your life, in your family, in this church, and in the whole world. And not just a change for four or eight years, but change for eternity. And his name is Jesus.

So this month, we are going to focus on how God used and continues to use the life, death and resurrection of Christ to change lives, and to change the whole world.

We begin today by seeing how Jesus confronted the power of evil.

Now I'm about to admit something that I can't believe I'm going to admit. I'd like to say it was only true when I was younger, but I think it's still true for me today. From the time I was a little kid, I've been afraid of the dark.

I remember growing up, we had a basement, and that's where my brother and I played. All our toys and games, and the TV we watched were down in the basement. And if it was evening outside, it was pitch black in the basement with the lights off. And I remember plenty of times walking into the basement without the light on, and kinda tiptoeing around. I would run to get out of the room and up the stairs to get into the light.

Even to this day, if I'm working here at the office late, and I turn the lights out, there's no street lights on Jack Jones Rd., and the hallway out here is pitch black, and I usually speed walk to the door to leave.

How many of you had fears, maybe when you were younger?

It's possible you are dealing with those fears right now. Maybe they have gone beyond the childhood fears of the dark and they are based in the real fears of this world.

- Afraid for your children going to school;
- afraid of illness;
- afraid of terrorists striking at any time in any place;
- afraid of some financial crisis that might strike and everything you own will be gone in a heartbeat.

I think many of us have had to deal with our fear of evil or of the darkness in our lives. Perhaps your fears are of an even deeper nature. They are more about spiritual darkness than anything else.

- That you or your children might die without Christ;
- that some temptation you have given in to will sweep you away from all that is good in life;

- frustration about why innocent people have to suffer.
- a fear that you are really lost and you don't know if you will ever find God.

Jesus told his disciples: **"Why are you so afraid? Do you still have no faith?"** You see, Jesus changes our fears when we have faith and trust in Him. And he does a lot more than that.

Let me back up and give you some context. Jesus told his disciples not to fear on a night while they were facing down their own fears. They were confronting evil in a powerful way. You see Jesus had done some amazing things. He had spoken like no other communicator ever had before. He revealed truths about God no one had ever known. And he performed many miracles. And in Matthew 16, the bible says Jesus asked His disciples who they thought he was.

The Bible records that Simon Peter replied with the right answer:

"Simon Peter answered, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." Jesus replied, "Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by man, but by my Father in heaven. And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it." (Matthew 16:16-18, NIV)

This was a bold statement about Jesus and His church. When you think about it, gates are a defensive structure. Gates don't attack, they are attacked. So the point Jesus was making is not that Hell will attack the church, and the church will defend itself against hell and evil. Jesus said His church would confront evil, and evil would not be able to resist the power of the church. And I want you to think about that for just a minute... **The gates of hell will not overcome the church.**

Jesus spent much of his time teaching and ministering near the Sea of Galilee to a mostly Jewish audience. Jesus and his disciples were Jewish, and they lived on the west and North sides of the Sea of Galilee. But the Southeast side of the lake is where pagan, ungodly people lived. Long before, God had given the Israelites the Promised land, and they drove out the pagans who had been living there. They were driven out to the East side of the Sea of Galilee.

Now, centuries later, Jesus and His disciples still saw the pagans who lived on that side of the sea as evil. They worshipped idols, and they practiced forms of immoral and sexual worship that would make any of us blush just to mention. And worse, that sort of behavior was and is repulsive to God.

...So Jesus says he came to confront evil, to go to sinners and show them love, to confront fear, to visit the ungodly. And the gates of hell will not be able to keep the church back. And then in a very powerful way, he takes his disciples on a journey. And instead of just telling you about it, I want to show you that journey.

This month, we're going to peer through a window into the lands of the Bible by watching a clip from Ray Vander Laan's "Faith Lessons: On the Death and Resurrection of the Messiah". Let's take a journey to the land of the Bible to understand how Jesus Confronted Evil.

Play Clip (8 Mins). – Here Mr. Vander Laan explains how the Jews in Jesus' day viewed the Decapolis as a pagan place, and the lake of Galilee was seen as the Abyss. Therefore, when Jesus calmed the storm and took the disciples into the Decapolis where they encountered the demoniac, it demonstrated Jesus' power over evil, and it changed the disciples' understanding about confronting the gates of hell.

Let's pick up right where that video left off, in Mark chapter 5.

Mark 5, NIV

1They went across the lake to the region of the Gerasenes.^[a] 2When Jesus got out of the boat, a man with an evil^[b] spirit came from the tombs to meet him. 3This man lived in the tombs, and no one could bind him any more, not even with a chain. 4For he had often

been chained hand and foot, but he tore the chains apart and broke the irons on his feet. No one was strong enough to subdue him. 5Night and day among the tombs and in the hills he would cry out and cut himself with stones.

6When he saw Jesus from a distance, he ran and fell on his knees in front of him. 7He shouted at the top of his voice, "What do you want with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? Swear to God that you won't torture me!" 8For Jesus had said to him, "Come out of this man, you evil spirit!"

9Then Jesus asked him, "What is your name?"

"My name is Legion," he replied, "for we are many." 10And he begged Jesus again and again not to send them out of the area.

11A large herd of pigs was feeding on the nearby hillside. 12The demons begged Jesus, "Send us among the pigs; allow us to go into them." 13He gave them permission, and the evil spirits came out and went into the pigs. The herd, about two thousand in number, rushed down the steep bank into the lake and were drowned.

Just take a minute and picture this scene, because I don't want us to miss just how evil and frightening, and revolting this is. The disciples go through a frightening storm, and Jesus calms it. Then they get across the sea to the pagan territory, and the first thing they see is someone out of a horror movie. Scars and blood all over his face and body, chains broken around his arms and feet, screaming and running straight toward them. And He falls in front of Jesus, who talks to the demons within this man.

Am I the only one here who would be scared at this point?!? The demons answer Jesus, and reveal that there are many of them, and Jesus casts them into pigs. Two thousand pigs, possibly two thousand demons were in this man. And as soon as they go into the pigs, this whole herd of filthy pigs stampedes off the cliff down the rocks to the lake. This is one nasty, bloody, filthy mess.

14Those tending the pigs ran off and reported this in the town and countryside, and the people went out to see what had happened. 15When they came to Jesus, they saw the man who had been possessed by the legion of demons, sitting there, dressed and in his right mind; and they were afraid. 16Those who had seen it told the people what had happened to the demon-possessed man—and told about the pigs as well. 17Then the people began to plead with Jesus to leave their region.

18As Jesus was getting into the boat, the man who had been demon-possessed begged to go with him. 19Jesus did not let him, but said, "Go home to your family and tell them how much the Lord has done for you, and how he has had mercy on you." 20So the man went away and began to tell in the Decapolis^[6] how much Jesus had done for him. And all the people were amazed. (Mark 5:1-20, NIV)

So the disciples travel by boat, through a storm, across the Sea of Galilee to **The Decapolis** – the land of the seven pagan nations who fought against the Israelites. This is where they had migrated to when the Jews pushed them out of their country. Jesus was showing that God was bringing light into the dark regions. Salvation would be for everyone.

Let's look again for a minute at this demon possessed man. Think about the evil he had experienced.

- He was **totally alone** – no family or friends.
- He was **physically scarred** by his experiences. (Cut himself.)

- He was an **emotional wreck**. (He would cry out at night.)
- He was **spiritually devastated**. Can you imagine what it must have been like to be possessed by what may have been thousands of demonic spirits?

Sometimes the sin in our world causes the same problems in our spiritual lives.

Where could that man turn for help?

- Certainly the local doctors had no cure for what possessed him.
- The local religious leaders could do nothing to relieve his suffering. In fact, I would argue that they helped to increase his suffering because they did not know God either. They were pagan priests, and they may have even contributed to this man's condition.

There was only one person who could help him: only one who could bring about real change that he could believe in. That one person was and is **JESUS!**

Jesus went across that evil sea to that evil place for one purpose: **to free that man from evil.**

And when he healed that man, he taught some important lessons, not only to his disciples, but to us, too.

- The disciples are reminded once again: with Jesus we have nothing to fear.
- That region where evil was so prevalent eventually was changed, due in no small part to the work of this one healed man.

Now think about that man who was healed. He asked Jesus if he could go with him. He didn't want to keep living among the pagan people anymore. Jesus said no. Jesus said **"Go home to your family and tell them how much the Lord has done for you, and how he has had mercy on you."**

Here is the point. That demon possessed man was the first recorded healing in that region. That man had gone and told his family and friends what Jesus had done for him. In fact, the scripture says he went throughout the Decapolis and told people and they were all amazed.

Understand this: According to Mark chapter 6 the next time Jesus came into that region, instead of chasing him from their presence, they flocked to hear the healer.

53When they had crossed over, they landed at Gennesaret and anchored there. 54As soon as they got out of the boat, people recognized Jesus. 55They ran throughout that whole region and carried the sick on mats to wherever they heard he was. 56And wherever he went—into villages, towns or countryside—they placed the sick in the marketplaces. They begged him to let them touch even the edge of his cloak, and all who touched him were healed. – Mark 6:53-56, NIV

It was all because of one man, telling what the Lord had done for him. Maybe you don't know a lot about the bible or have a lot of knowledge. Here is what you can do. **Simply tell others what Jesus has done for you.** You don't have to know everything there is to know about the bible. Simply tell them what Jesus means to you. You may open up some hearts and minds and you might light a spark that will lead them to the freedom you have found.

Conclusion

So what did Jesus teach us by taking his disciples in that boat across the lake, to the land of evil? How did Jesus confront evil? **In that biblical event we see two different groups: the man who was freed by Jesus, and the disciples who were already following Jesus.**

1. **First of all, when Jesus healed the demon-possessed man, He taught us that he will go through anything to show you hope and healing and love.**

The same Jesus that confronted evil **showed us** how when he took his disciples across that lake, calmed that storm, and when He cast the demons out of a frightening monster of a man. **Jesus did it all just to heal one man.** Jesus is stronger than any evil you will ever face. And with Christ on our side, the gates of hell will not overcome the church.

Think about it: Jesus went across the sea to heal just one man, and He would go across any ocean and confront the most evil, pagan land to rescue you too!

And he did, you know... Jesus confronted the evil of this world, the evil of death and suffering, and the grave. He faced down the evil of the cross, and he laid his life down. And he did it to bring healing into your life and mine. But none of those evil things could beat him. He conquered the grave. The gates of hell could not overcome Him.

2. And here's the second lesson for those who are already his disciples.

I think Jesus was teaching that there is no place the Gospel should not or cannot go. How far are we willing to go to bring good news and salvation to people who don't have it? Has our church has been playing defense, or even worse... have we been on the sidelines? It's time to get in the game and get on offense. The gates of hell will not overcome the church.

Instead of being afraid of terrorists and Muslims, and people in the Middle East, who is going to go to Afghanistan and Iraq and Iran and tell people about the Jesus who loves them and died to set them free? Who will go to China, or India, or Indonesia where being a Christian or a missionary can land you in prison or get you beaten or worse? The gates of hell will not overcome the church.

Who is going to go to the bad parts of town, to people different from ourselves, where crime is more common? How about the inner-city? How about across the street? Who will go and share the love of Christ to people who are scary, or people who are evil? The gates of hell will not overcome the church.

Were not going to be afraid in this church of hell coming into our church, or of people who are far from God coming into our church. Many people use church to **hide** from the world, and do everything in their power to keep the bad element **out**. But if Jesus had had that philosophy, he never would have gotten in that boat to go heal the demon-possessed man, and he never would have gone to the cross for you and me.

Church, there are people in this world without hope, unloved, and lost. We need to go to them, no matter how evil we might think they are, no matter how scared we might be to leave our comfortable church building, and the familiarity of our homes. We know everyone, and everything is predictable and comfortable here. But what about out there? Satan needs to be afraid that we are reaching into the darkness with the light of Christ to help lost people find salvation. Jesus said, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven." And the darker the place is, the brighter our light will shine. And the gates of hell will never overcome the light of Christ in His church.

So who do you need to be reaching out to? And why would we feel **inconvenienced** to reach out to lost people? It might take some time and energy and yes we might have to give up something for our own comfort and pleasure, but their freedom is worth whatever price we could pay, whatever sacrifice we might make.

Jesus loves you. And Jesus is reaching out to you. He confronted evil to reach that man. He has the answer for you. He can heal you. He can help you. He can give you peace. He can give you a purpose in life. And He made a purpose for this church, too. Our job is to boldly take the light of Christ to the darkest places on earth, whether that's across the street or across the globe.

Jesus Christ is the only one who can bring about real change you can believe in!

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