

XVII. Revival in Biblical Perspective

Christianity in America

“The Decapolis Revival”

Mark 5:1–20

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July 2, 2017, Morning Sermon

We are in a series titled ‘Revive Us Again’ and in this study we come to the revival at Decapolis in Mark 5. This is God’s Word and God’s Word is the truth. Mark 5:1–20 says [1] *They 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. [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.” [8] For he was saying to him, “Come out of the man, you unclean spirit!” [9] And Jesus asked him, “What is your name?” He replied, “My name is Legion, for we are many.” [10] And he begged him earnestly 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.*

[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, sitting there, clothed and in his right mind, and they were 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. [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.” [20] And he went away and began to proclaim in the Decapolis how much Jesus had done for him, and everyone marveled.

The grass withers, the flower fades, God’s Word abides forever and by His grace and mercy may His Word be preached for you.

Have you heard recently, the phrase ‘Make America Great Again!’? Yes, we’ve all recently heard it but immediately I know the avenue to greatness is not that we seek greatness but that we humble ourselves before the Lord, whether an individual or a nation. Although recently isn’t the first time this phrase has ever been used. There are two historians I have enjoyed reading throughout my life and they became fascinated as onlookers of what was happening in America. They wrote about it and commented on it. One was Alexis de Tocqueville and the other was Edmund Burke. I think you would find what they have said extremely interesting but I’m going to paraphrase and combine what both men have said. I am doing justice to what they have said.

Neither of them thought America was perfect or achieved everything it should achieve or ought to achieve but they did see something distinctive that was happening here and they did use the word great. Here is what they said; America is great because her churches are great. If you have ever wondered if a nation has lost its greatness how would they find it back then Alexis de Tocqueville and Edmond Burke would tell you that America is great because her churches are great and if America ceases to be great then she will cease to be great. It seems to me to take their analysis we wouldn't pray for repentance if we didn't have a lot of flaws that needed to be mended. Lord, curb us with self-control instead of self-absorption.

There is much that we need to repent of but I wanted to look at this revival in Decapolis for a very specific reason and I have no problem as a Christian patriot. Notice that I am not a patriot who is a Christian but I'm a Christian who is a patriot. In other words, my Christianity informs my patriotism. My Christianity is not used for my patriotism but it informs and directs my patriotism. As a Christian patriot I know it is right for me to thank God for what is obvious. If I want God to do something among the nations and I can't stop and praise God for what He has done in my own nation, then why would I expect Him to hear my prayers for all the nations if I'm not committed to my nation which means I need to thank Him for what He has done in my nation and to ask Him to do it again.

I believe this country is here because of two great movements of God and they were called Great Awakenings. There was a Great Awakening where God brought revival to His church and from that came a Gospel harvest or great awakening of the Gospel that swept this nation from 1735 to 1765. If you notice these dates that is what gave birth to this nation in the 1770s and 1780s. Then we descended rapidly again into rebellion against God and God was so pleased to send another Great Awakening which began in 1785 and went all the way to 1880 with individual works throughout various regions during that 100 year period. Since then we have had some blessings of God in localities but we have not had such a Great Awakening again, why? It is because Great Awakenings/ Gospel harvests come from revived churches.

In other words, great movements of God come from a great movement of God in great churches. When God makes the church great for His glory then it becomes an instrument that God uses for great awakenings. So I look at my country and I would love for it to be great for Christ but I know it can't be without great churches who have known the greatness of God. How great is our God. How great Thou art! God's people need to know the greatness of God's grace and mercy and this leads to revival.

We have done two things continuously in this series and one is to go to the Scripture and two to determine what to say revival is. It is not a program that can be introduced in a church. It is something that comes down by God by His extraordinary hand of blessing and therefore we have used a definition that is consistent with God's Word. It is a Biblical definition of revival which is revival is an extraordinary work of God's grace through ordinary people in ordinary places by ordinary means with extraordinary consequences for God's glory. Revival is not earned or worked up and when God brings revival down there are two extraordinary consequences/evidences that inevitably accompany revivals.

One evidence is vertical which is God-centered worship where people passionately desire not to come together for personal religious entertainment but to come together to praise God from whom all blessings flow in a way that pleases God. Then the second evidence comes when they scatter and take that great, glorious message of God and His grace and truth to the world. We call this a Gospel harvest where hundreds and thousands are gathered into the Kingdom of God from such churches that are experiencing those revivals among His people as they go out to

the peoples of the world, beginning with their own nation. Gospel awakenings come from revived churches. Revival is not evangelism. Revival is what God does to get His people back to where they ought to be but when revival comes, it's inevitably impact is evangelism. God's people start reaching out with the Gospel when God has reached down and brought them back to Himself.

So if I want a great awakening and the greatness of God to be experienced in a nation then I know that a great awakening comes from a great movement of God among His people to revive His people by His Spirit and with His Word. Consistently that stands in Scripture. We spent time in previous studies looking at five revivals in the book of Chronicles and in each one of them God raised up a revival leader from an ordinary person who was used of God to bring an extraordinary work of God's grace among His people and there was extraordinary consequences out where people didn't yet know the Lord so there was a Gospel harvest that took place afterwards. Then we saw the same thing happen in the book of Nehemiah where God brought a revival to Jerusalem and then God changed the entire landscape of everything around it.

In the New Testament also saw a revival in Acts 2 where it starts with 120 people praying, God visits with power and they then go out to preach the Gospel and 3,000 come to Christ. That is just counting the men and just a couple of days later 5,000 will come to Christ and that is just counting the men. We also looked at the Sycharian revival with the woman at the well. Jesus comes to bring revival to this place of apostasy in Samaria. This place was so apostate that a good Jew wouldn't even walk through Samaria but Jesus went there on purpose to meet that woman at the well. As revival came to Sychar she went into the village and out comes the white field unto harvest as the Sycharian people from the village come out because she told them what He had done for her. As they hear Jesus they believe Him themselves and just because of the woman. So there is a Gospel harvest through a revival.

We see this time and time again and that's the way it happens. I do not expect something to happen in this nation until something happens in the churches and nothing will happen in the churches until a reformation hits the leaders again. When that reformation hits the leaders and God brings revival to churches then comes the Gospel awakenings so I thought we would reach into the life of Jesus not only as He went to the woman at the well but as He goes to Decapolis in Mark 5. Let's see if we see that extraordinary work of God's grace here as they are with ordinary people in an ordinary place and with ordinary means. I have stood at this very hillside fifteen times in my life that ends up in the Sea of Galilee. As I have stood there time and time again I have thought about what happened here. What does that mean today for us?

I want to give you four things from this revival at Decapolis and then one takeaway. Here Jesus gets in a boat, goes across the Sea of Galilee and they land on the eastern side of the Sea of Galilee. This area is known at the foothills of the Golan Heights. In the text it was described as the 'other side of the sea.' There's a good chance that if Jesus had told the Disciples where they were going they probably wouldn't have gotten in the boat or tried to talk Jesus out of getting in the boat, because that was the place that was so apostate. It is worse than Samaria. Here is where the Assyrian Empire has swept in, after that the Babylonian Empire, after that the Medo-Persian Empire, after that the Greek Empire and the Greeks descended into Greek paganism.

The Greek society and culture was dominated by sexual perversion, immorality, idolatry of appetites, idolatry of the human mind, the Greek concept of philosophy in which man is the determiner and measurer of truth that glorifies human reason. I praise God for human reason but my reason doesn't reason to God for my reason is based upon God's revelation to me. I know

the Truth by revelation and can reason from the truth but not them for they would suspend anything that claimed to be God's Word. Their reason was lifted up above God. This was a place where the tribes of Israel had known the blessings of God time and time again and now they have abandoned the God who has blessed them for Greek paganism, mythology and rebellion against God with its absorption of self and its hedonistic philosophy of self-gratification of the appetites, and the elevation of human reason to idolatry.

They have abandoned it so much that they don't even call it by its Hebrew names anymore which were the names that God had given these places. They call it Decapolis which is a Greek name which means 'ten cities.' In fact, it had become such a place of rebellion against God that Satan and demons felt like home. The demons told Jesus not to send them out of this area, for this was home base for them. It was so evil that Mark initially can't bring himself to call it by its name but he calls it 'the other side of the sea.' When I was growing up I remember there were some places my mom would tell me 'good boys don't go over there, that's the other side of the tracks.' I can just hear the Disciples telling Jesus 'mother said we couldn't go over there cuz' that's the other side of the sea' when Jesus might have said 'let's go to Decapolis.'

Jesus gets in the boat and goes to the other side, now here's your first lesson. There is no place Jesus will not go to bring revival and save the lost. Jesus says 'get in the boat, let's go.' A well in Samaria; He says 'I must go there.' Jesus will go anywhere with Gospel awakenings. So we cross no place off because there is no place He won't go to bring revival and to seek and save the lost.

Number two, there is no power that Jesus cannot overcome to bring revival and save the lost. If they had known where they were going it's likely they might not have even gotten in the boat but perhaps if Jesus had said 'let's go' they did get in the boat but if He had further told them who they were going to meet on the way over they may not have even gotten out of the boat once they got there. They are meeting the gates of hell itself. It is a place where the power of darkness feels at home. It is a place of apostasy. It is a place that had been blessed by God but said 'no' to God and 'yes' to everything else. It's obvious isn't it? If there were still good Jewish people what were they doing with a herd of pigs? Satan's demons feel at home there for they were even willing to live in the pigs. Jesus sends them where they want to go into the pigs, the pigs go over the hillside into the Sea of Galilee and maybe we think Jesus is being nice here. It does say He permitted them but what He is really doing is allowing them to sign His sovereign directed death warrant.

Think like a Hebrew here. Rivers are good but seas are bad. The roaring sea represents evil but the rivers represent life. The rivers bring life but the sea brings death. Roaring is the foams and waves that would overwhelm you. So when Jesus sends the demons into the unclean pigs and then over the hillside into the sea then they have just entered the door to the abyss of hades. It is the torment that He is consigning them to. He is Lord for there is no power He cannot overcome to bring revival and save the lost.

When I went to Miami, Florida I found a church that was about to close down. There were no children, there were two retirement homes close by and with one good flu season I didn't have a church. I was praying for God to do something. There had been nine pastors in the history of this church and the fourth one called me up and said 'We're so glad you're in the PCA. This is your first church right?' I told him it was and then he said 'Did you pray about this?' I told him I did and then he said 'I think that church has the mark of Satan on it.' That is not real encouraging to hear when this is your first church right out of seminary. Then he told me that the first pastor was stabbed with a knife when his wife found out he was having an affair with the

choir director. He survived but he was out of the ministry. The second pastor was out of the ministry due to an addiction to prescription drugs. The third pastor was out of the ministry because of his wife's alcoholism. He didn't want to tell me what had happened to him.

After my first Sunday there I was about to agree with him on what this fourth pastor had told me. I went to the back of the church after it was over to shake hands with people and there was no one to shake hands with. They may have been old but they sure were quick when it came to leaving. I went out to the parking lot knocking on car windows just trying to tell them it wouldn't be that bad next Sunday but they didn't want to stop. When I came back up to the church the part time janitor had already locked the doors to the church at five minutes after 12 and I had to break into the church the second Sunday I was there to get my wife's purse that had our car keys just so we could go home. I told Cindy 'Honey, we are not in Kansas anymore.'

A couple of Sundays after that I shared the Gospel and the choir director came to Christ, the deacon came to Christ and so did others for 28 people of the 50 plus people came to Christ and God started a work that is still there to this day by His grace and mercy. The Presbytery actually called me and asked me if we would sell the property and start over. Yet a few years ago at the General Assembly meeting there were four of us who had preached at that church that they wanted to close. So much for the mark of Satan. Again, there is no power that Jesus cannot overcome to bring revival and save the lost using very ordinary people, through ordinary means in ordinary places.

So many times we mess this up. Have you noticed how we pray for humility after we have exalted ourselves? God says we have that wrong for He didn't give humility as a prayer request but as an action. We are to humble ourselves so that God can exalt us at the right time. Here is something else we do. We resist temptation and flee Satan. James 4:7 says *[7] Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.* We are to resist Satan and he will flee from us.

There is no power that Jesus cannot overcome to bring revival and to seek and save the lost for two reasons. One is at the cross He defeated Satan. He hasn't destroyed him yet but He'll do that when He comes back the second time. We are willing to rage against the captor and love the captive soul because the outcome is secure. He has bound the strong man so go plunder his house. I saw Satan falling like lightning so go and preach the Gospel to all the nations for He has overcome. All we are called to do is to put on the armor of God, take up the weapons of the Spirit and resist the evil one for he will flee from you. The second reason why is in I John 4:4 which says *[4] Little children, you are from God and have overcome them, for He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world.* So we move with confidence not in ourselves, not in our programs, or our personality packages but because of how great our God is.

One time I heard an evangelist say at the end of his message as he led into his invitation, 'Now you have heard the good news of the Gospel that Jesus died for your sins but you need to receive Him and Jesus called people to publically receive Him so I want you to know that God has voted for you and Satan has voted against you. Now it's your opportunity to break the tie if you'll stand up and come to Jesus.' Praise God for this man's passion and maybe the methodology may even be effective but it is terribly theology because when God votes and Satan votes there is no tie. Satan is a fallen angel and there is only One true and living God. Satan is God's Satan. Our great God rules and reigns!

The third one is there is no person so far away that Jesus cannot revive them or so lost that Jesus cannot save them. Who are the three most prolific writers of the Bible? It is Moses, David and Paul. All three are murderers or conspirators to murder and look what He did with

them. Look what He did with a three time traitor like Peter. God delights in saving sinners and there is no one so lost that He cannot save or someone so far away that He cannot revive them and bring them back.

In the days of Jesus the Rabbis had identified five marks of demon possession. One is supernatural strength. Two is bizarre behavior. Three is uncleanness, no hygiene. Four sexual perversion and five necromancy, communion with the dead. Mark wove all five of these marks in his narrative of the demon possessed man. We see his supernatural strength in that the chains couldn't hold him. His bizarre behavior included cutting himself with stones and crying out all the time. We see the necromancy as he lives among the tombs of the dead. We see his sexual perversion as he goes around with no clothes on, exposing himself continually. In doing that we see his uncleanness and no hygiene.

So if that man who we see through those marks as demon possessed walked in among us, what would you do? I probably would get behind someone perhaps more spiritual than me but Jesus would revive him or save him. So again realize that there is no person so far away or lost that Jesus cannot revive or save.

Fourthly, there is no person that Jesus has revived or saved He cannot use to revive or save others. There were actually two demon possessed men but Mark only gives us information about one of them but the word goes out when Jesus does this. People are talking saying things like 'remember that demon possessed man who went around with no clothes on, he is now sitting in his right mind reasoning and in clothes.' 'Really, let me go see this.' That is the testimony and they come out to see it. 'Oh and by the way you ought to see what happened to the pigs.' Did you notice? They had fear when they had heard about what the Lord had done with the man but when they find out about the pigs that went over the cliff they wanted Jesus to leave.

When God starts doing something there is always two responses. One is attraction and conviction - I need Him. The other is 'get Him out of here.' There is a lot of money being made on sin. They say 'did you see what He did to our pigs? No telling what will get cleaned up if He stays around here.' They tell Him to leave and Jesus leaves but He is not retreating. This is strategic redeployment and I'll show you what I mean but before I do just remember that there is no person Jesus has revived or saved that He cannot use to revive or save others and we see that right in this passage because this man doesn't want to stay there. He wants to go with Jesus to leave this place and follow Him. Jesus answers his prayer by saying 'no.'

I hear people many times say 'Jesus answers prayer' and what they mean is that He said 'yes' to what they asked Him. He actually has two other answers which are 'no' and 'keep praying.' He told this man 'no' but He would stay with him through the power of the Holy Spirit. Jesus told him to go home and tell his family and friends about the great things the Lord had done for him. The man went and began to tell others throughout Decapolis what great things God had done for him.

Here's the takeaway. When revival comes to the Body of Christ then the Body of Christ will go to seek and save the lost. In other words, revival leads to a Gospel harvest and when we go there is no place we will not go for go anywhere and everywhere God leads us. There is no power we will retreat from or no power that we cannot overcome by the power of the cross and the Holy Spirit. There is no person that we go to that cannot be saved or revived and there is no person saved whom He cannot use to go to seek and to save others.

Look how the Lord used the woman at the well through her life of prostitution. What about a demon possessed man? Do you remember a man named Paul Harvey who used to give you the rest of the story? There is another part of this story! Let's look at Mark 7. When Jesus

leaves Decapolis He goes to the Sea of Galilee and teaches in Mark 6. The only time He ever left Israel was to go to Tyre and Sidon. Remember I said that Jesus wasn't leaving Decapolis because they told Him to, for I said this was a strategic redeployment. After He returns from Tyre and Sidon we pick up where He goes next in Mark 7:31 which says [31] *Then He returned from the region of Tyre and went through Sidon to the Sea of Galilee, in the region of the Decapolis.* In other words, He left went a few places and then came back to Decapolis. Now let's look at Mark 8.

Mark 8:1–2 says [1] *In those days (in Decapolis), when again a great crowd had gathered, and they had nothing to eat, he called his disciples to him and said to them, [2] "I have compassion on the crowd, because they have been with me now three days and have nothing to eat."* He will end up feeding this crowd and later in this chapter we see that there are 4,000 in this crowd. He has already done this once with a crowd of 5,000 people. Now He does it a second time in Decapolis with a crowd of 4,000 and that is just counting the men. So the crowd is somewhere between 8,000 to 12,000. The very place that asked Him to leave are willing to starve to death to hear Him and to be near Him.

I wonder why a place that has asked Him to leave now months later asks and wants Him to stay even at the risk of not eating and drinking. I don't know all that happened but I know one thing that happened. There was a man who was demon possessed who got saved, went home and started telling people the great things that the Lord has done for Him. The next time Jesus showed up there are thousands who come out to see Him. This is just like the Sycharians who heard the testimony of the woman at the well and went out to see Him at the well.

Where are the thousands? Where is that group of that great awakening sweeping thousands in? They are not here. Why not? Could it be not only the inadequacies of the one giving this study to you but that we haven't gone and told them what great things the Lord has done for us? Could it be that we have gotten used to the great things that God has done for us? Could it be that we need God to do a great thing in us again? Revive us again. Let's pray.

Prayer:

Let the Holy Spirit speak to your heart as He speaks to mine. God, we want to go home to our friends and family and we do not want to be silent though the culture would try to marginalize us even as they have tried to marginalize Jesus' ministry in Decapolis. Father, we're just sinners that have been saved by grace and we have got to go tell them Who has done it and the great things He has done in our lives. We want to bring them to You even as You send us to them but send us to them by first coming to us. Thank You for Your Son whom You sent to go to a cross to save us and do great things to redeem us. Now God give us a sense of what great things You have done that we will not retreat to a boat but we'll go home to our family and friends and tell them. O God would You bring thousands through us to Yourself and do great things for them and make a nation great again with the same greatness that You've done it with in the past, not only in this nation but in other nations. You are our great God and Savior Jesus, high and lifted up and we will bow down for I pray in Jesus' Name, Amen.

Power Point

REVIVAL

Revival is an extraordinary work of God's grace through ordinary people in ordinary places by

ordinary means with extraordinary consequences for God's glory.

+ God-centered Worship

+ Gospel Harvest

THE DECAPOLIS REVIVAL

I. There is no place that Jesus will not go to bring revival and save the lost.

II. There is no power that Jesus cannot overcome to bring revival and save the lost.

III. There is no person so far away or lost that Jesus cannot revive and save.

IV. There is no person that Jesus has revived or saved He cannot use to revive and save others.

LIFE TAKEAWAY

When revival comes, the Body of Christ will go "to seek and save the lost" and there is...

-no place we will not go

-no power we cannot overcome

-no person so lost who cannot be saved

-no person saved whom He cannot use to go