

**THE REAL JESUS**  
**A Series on the Book of Mark**  
**“An Atrocious Math of the Gospel”**  
**Mark 4:35-41**  
**New City Church of LA**  
**November 16, 2008**  
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**I. Vision of New City**

Welcome to New City. We’re a multi-ethnic, multi-socioeconomic come-as-you-are church in downtown LA. We’re a church where everyone is welcomed.

Vision statement: Focus on growing together and the retreat coming up!

We’re in the middle of a series called THE REAL JESUS. We’ve been going through the Book of Mark a passage at a time. We are trying to get a clear picture of who Jesus is right from the source.

**II. Introduction**

Evil is all around us. We see it in the world. We see it in the evening news. We see it in wars. We see it in drive-by shootings. We see it when the addicted guy is willing to do whatever to get his fix. We see it when you get overcome with desire for lust and end up going on an Internet porn binge. We see it when we reach that breaking point see ourselves hitting someone, hating someone, cursing someone. We see it in our hearts when we can’t forgive. We see it in our hearts when we are so habitually self-centered. Today’s passage is about that evil. The bible says that evil is personal. The bible call it demon or Satan or evil spirit.

Let’s read Mark 4:35-41

This passage tells us about:

(1) Our problem of personal evil; (2) the limits of the world’s solution; and (3) the atrocious, insensible, math of God’s solution.

**III. First, this passage tells us about our problem of personal evil.**

A. *Reasons to believe in the existence of a personal evil.*

When you read stories like this, some of you can't help but to question the existence of evil and demons. Your worldview attributes stuff of demons and evil spirits to fiction or to beliefs of unenlightened ancient people. But, we're modern people, you say, "we don't believe in demons." You say: We used to believe it when we didn't understand how things like epilepsy worked. We now know that what looks like demonization is a chemical brain imbalance.

But, there are good reasons to believe in a personal evil. Let me give you three reasons:

(1) Any kind of theology or world-view which ignores the existence of spiritual forces of evil has a great deal to explain.

- What about these suicide bombs that have been going on a middle of a shopping area? How can anybody do that? The terrible massacres that go on around the world? 9-11?
- The sexual or physical abuse of young children?
- Look at Jewish holocaust, Rwanda and Darfur.

There's a reality out there. How do we explain all this?

William Peter Blatty, who wrote and produced *The Exorcist*, said:

“As far as God goes, I'm a non-believer. But when it comes to the devil – well, that's something else. The devil keeps advertising. The devil does lots of commercials.”

(2) If you believe in God (and most people know that it is impossible to prove that he does not exist), if personal supernatural good could exist, why not personal supernatural evil?

(3) I think the biblical understanding of demons is a part of the deepest, most multi-faceted, most complex, least simplistic, least naïve, most nuanced view of reality that exist.

For example, Matthew 4:24 says this:

24News about him spread all over Syria, and people brought to him all who were ill with various diseases, those suffering severe pain, the demon-possessed, those having seizures, and the paralyzed, and he healed them.

This means that the Bible distinguishes between those suffering from diseases and those who are demon possessed. Also, the word translated as “seizures” is translated as epilepsy in several translations or lunatic in KJV (and now, a more appropriate word to use is insane). So the Bible distinguishes between insanity and demon possession.

The nuanced view of the Bible can be illustrated by the sermon of a pastor named, Richard Baxter: a 17th century pastor. He preached a sermon called, “preservatives against melancholy and overmuch sorrow.” It’s 17<sup>th</sup> century sermon on depression. He says: according to the Bible, if you are depressed, there could four different reasons for depression:

- (1) physical—you need rest, medicine,
- (2) moral—guilt and shame—confession,
- (3) mental or psychological basis—discouraged, worn out emotionally, you need love and support, talk, and community,
- (4) evil—demonic root and you need prayer and the word of God.

A lot of people have a very simple, reductionistic worldview:

- Some worldviews are more materialistic than the bible—take a pill;
- some psychological—talk and acceptance-- get love;
- some moral—do the right thing, confess and do it right;
- some views are just demon focused, and everything is reduced to the work of demons.

Many worldviews reduce it to a single problem. But, the Scripture is very multi-dimensional. There is no template for figuring this out. If you see a problem, you have to attack it from all angles. If you move out to the world in less nuanced and less complex way than the bible, if you don’t see the complexity that the bible says about evil—that it’s out there, that it’s in here, it is going to defeat you.

So, there are good reasons to believe in the existence of personal evil, and it’s very important to take into the reality of personal evil when we view the causes of problems in this world.

B. *The problems of personal evil in our lives: we are legion*

But, often times, we look at stories like this and of course, we can appreciate the power of Jesus but we don't identify with the person with the evil spirit at all. Plus, we're a Christian and we can't be demon possessed, you say, or can we? Yes, there is some controversy about it, but I think a Christian can't be possessed by demons in the sense that we are completely controlled by demons anymore because Holy Spirit dwells in us, but we can be *oppressed* by or be under the *influence* of, or tempted by or become entangled by demons and evil spirits.

So, even if we are not possessed by evil spirits like this man, we can be oppressed or influenced by demons in our lives. We need to understand that we live in a fallen world where it is polluted with demonic forces. There can be a demonic pull that leads us to lie, to hesitate to forgive, to lead us to compromise, to slowly pull us into greed, self-centeredness, hostility. The influence of the demon is often very subtle. It affects the way we deal with our relationships, jobs, money, in everyday dealing. There is a force out there that can pull us into it.

Often times, we battle with demons on our own and in many ways look like this man in the story.

*Out of Control*

Just like this man, our lives are out of control. There are things we do that we can't seem to stop. Maybe it's drugs. Maybe it's alcohol. Maybe it's greed. There is something that drives you and you can't seem to control it. You know it's hurting you. But, you can't control it.

Sometime, this being out of control is very subtle. You think you're in control but you are actually being controlled by the evil one. The demons tell you that if you only get that, you're going to be okay. If you only get a job, everything will be okay. If you only get a woman, everything is going to be okay. If you only have money, everything is going to be okay. These "if I only have" are your masters, and you, their slave. We are enslaved by money, success, approval, ambition, acceptance. What happens is that slowly, these things eat you up. If you are not controlled by God, you are ultimately controlled by idols of your life, essentially demons.

### Abandoned

And like this man, we feel abandoned by everyone, particularly the people we love. Maybe they betrayed you. Maybe they hurt you so bad that it still hurts when you think about it. Maybe there is a sense of bitterness, anger, or even numbness in your heart because they hurt you.

### In Pain

And like this man, sometimes there is something in our lives that hurts so much that you just want to yell out, and it hurts so much that you hurt yourself, you cut yourself, like this man. Maybe you grew up abandoned or feeling abandoned. Someone left you and left you for dead, emotionally or physically. Maybe there was abuse. Maybe you failed in something or did something and you can't help come to the conclusion that you are not worthy. Sometimes, we hurt so much that we don't care what we do anymore.

I remember one of us telling us the story of how he hurt so much after his son was shot in a drive-by shooting. It hurt so much that he stopped caring. He stopped living and became homeless. I remember another one of us sharing about how her boyfriend was killed and the pain was so severe that she literally cut herself—just to feel physically the pain she felt inside. I know another person in our fellowship whose relationship was at one time so in turmoil, that she would cut herself. Maybe for some of you, it is not physically cutting yourself, but emotionally, psychologically, or even spiritually hurting yourself. For many of us, there is a deep sense of desperation, pain, hurt.

### Oppressed from every side

Like this man, we feel like there is a legion, which is an army of about 6,000, within us, oppressing us. C.S. Lewis, describing his life before becoming a Christian, said: “a zoo of lusts, a bedlam of ambitions, a nursery of fears, a harem of fondled hatreds. My name is legion.”

We are also oppressed, stressed, hard-pressed, full of hatred, fear, lust, ambition, greed, darkness inside of us. We are legion.

We need a solution.

The world has a solution and God has a solution.

**VI. Second, this passage also gives us the limits of the world solution.**

*A. The world's power has its limits.*

They try to chain him up and control him but it was never strong enough. In the same way, we try to fight against our problems by chaining it up and controlling it. But, our problems are often bigger than what we can do to control them. It's like there is something inside of us that has a life of its own. Jesus is saying that there is. We are in the middle of a spiritual warfare. The demons are trying to influence you and take a hold of you. And if you are trying to win on your own, you are going to have some problems. I know. You're saying that your problem is not as bad as this man's. But, the root of your problem is still spiritual. You may not be as demonized but you are also living under the influence of the demons.

I went to a dinner honoring Tommy Lasorda last night. His speech was a basic motivational speech. You can do it. Believe in yourself. Don't let anyone tell you otherwise. I think what he said is helpful. We need to try our best. But, we also need to understand that we can't change on our own. When the demons get a hold of us, we can't get out on our own. We have to seek God's power in our lives.

*B. The world's willingness to help you has limits.*

Also, there is a limit to the solution that the world is willing to offer. The towns people tried to help this man, but they couldn't; so, they gave up and left him to live in the tombs. They left him for dead.

When Jesus healed the man by sending the evil spirit to the pigs, the towns people got scared and begged Jesus to leave. Why? The basic worldview is utilitarian. Your value is based on your utility. They did not value this man life as much as they valued their pigs. The world is ultimately a cost-benefit analysis. That's how the world works.

If you don't shape up, the world will abandon you. If you don't prove beneficial to the world, the world will abandon you. The world is a cold place.

There is a limit to the solution that the world can afford.

**V. Third, this passage also shows us the atrocious math of God's solution**

*A. God's love has no limits.*

God does not use the math of cost-benefit analysis. One author, Philip Yancey, wrote an article entitled: The Atrocious Math of the Gospel. The gospel does not make sense from a cost-benefit point of view.

Look at this story. Before Jesus left, there were thousands of people trying to get to Jesus. Hundreds of people were being healed. Jesus was so popular that he had to teach from a boat so that he wouldn't be squeezed to death. There's a lot of bang for the bucks in terms of ministry. But, Jesus led his disciples on a boat trip across the lake to a gentile region. That's why they grew pigs. Jews didn't have anything to do with pigs because they were considered unkosher. They nearly get killed by a storm during the journey. When they land, they meet this guy that everyone in the town gave up on, someone even pagans thought was worthless. We know Jesus went to the margins of society to minister to people, but don't you think this is a little extreme? Taking a whole day out of his busy schedule, risking their lives, for this one demonized person? What an atrocious math of the gospel!

This is not the only example. How about the story of the shepherd who left his flock of 99 in the country, open and vulnerable, to search for that lost one? He could have done a quick cost-benefit analysis and said that it's not worth it. What an atrocious calculation!

God values you far more than you can imagine! Even if the world has given up on you, God has not given up on you. God loves you!

*B. God's power has no limits*

And this God does not just love you, he has the power to free you from evil one. We need to know who this real Jesus is and connect to his power. When this man, who has a legion of demons within, gets into the presence of Jesus, he is down on his knees. Jesus says to come out. People almost always call on a higher power. Some formula. Jesus alone does not call on any higher power. "come out of this man, you evil spirit." Look at this power. This is how he dealt with storm. He says to come out. What does

this mean? He is the higher power. He is power! There is no question that the legion has to do this. Jesus casts out the demons because he's got the power.

How did Jesus use that power? With love that does not calculate!

*C. What does absolute power with absolute love look like?*

At the end of this story, a man who was tormented by evil and lived in the tomb goes back to the city healed and with a new life. At the end of the book of Mark, Jesus is crying out and bleeding, he is driven from the city to the cross into the tomb—that is how is dealt with evil. Jesus absorbed evil into himself and he died on the cross so that he can wipe out evil without wiping us out. Only when we can see what it cost him. When you see the cost, that shows you how much he loves you, and how much he values you. It's seeing the cost that he paid to defeat evil that defeats evil in your life. Only when you see him bleeding and crying out, that you are able to defeat evil, and destroy its power.

Jesus didn't go around identifying people with evil and smite them, he died for them. Paul says: never repay evil for evil but with good.

Plunge your messedupness to the grace of Jesus and you will be cleaned.