**Breaking the Chains that Bind**

Mark 5:1-20

Rev. Brian Bill

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**Nate Weaver Testimony – Part 1**

My Name is Nate, I’m an unashamed believer in Jesus Christ and I struggle with sin.

When I was 16-years-old, my worst nightmare and biggest fear came true. My parents announced that they were getting a divorce. I was devastated by this news and I plunged into a state of shock, depression, grief, and confusion, without any support or sense of identity. I resorted to a survival mode mentality.

I soon discovered that my ego combined with my anxiety issues made for very good company with alcohol consumption. It was the beginning of a long tragic love affair, and God had been removed as even a blip on my radar for quite some time at this point.

Throughout college my drinking increased exponentially and what I thought at the time was just “experimental” drug use became much more than an occasional activity.

In 2005 probably the second most traumatic event in my life happened. One of my best friends who I had known since 7th grade died in a tragic car accident…this is where my drinking took its most dramatic turn.

I was working in sales for a company and some of my co-workers liked to split a couple pitchers of beer for lunch at work. This increase in drinking quickly started to become out of control and I didn’t even seem to notice it creeping up on me. Eventually I was drinking 24/7, morning, noon and night. Every waking moment of my life was controlled by the thinking about, acquiring and consuming of alcohol. It wasn’t long before my mind and body were completely dependent on the substance and it started to affect my relationships and reliability at work.

On a February morning in 2009 I had been feeling ill for a few days so I left work early. The next thing I remember is waking up in the ICU. Apparently I had an alcohol withdrawal induced seizure and I wrecked my car and had been in a coma for three days.

This was my first introduction to the horrible affects that this poison drug does to the body. It is like no other drug in the way that it makes the body’s vital central nervous system completely dependent on alcohol to function properly. You would think this near death experience would be enough to scare someone into sobriety forever. Unfortunately, for this alcoholic, not being able to drink was still scarier than death. These are the delusions of addiction at their finest.

I still somehow managed to keep a job for about three years. This lasted until October of 2012 when I went to the emergency room because I was vomiting blood nonstop. The doctors looked at me in amazement. They said that my vitamin levels were so low that I should have had a cardiac arrest three days earlier. I told them it had been at least 2 weeks since I had eaten anything. They called me a **walking dead man.**

Nate felt like a walking dead man. Grab your Bibles and turn to Mark 5 where we’ll meet a man who could be the main character out of the Night of the Living Dead or the main star in the Zombie Apocalypse.

Last weekend we traveled with Jesus across the Sea of Galilee when a mega storm came up and we learned that God’s plans may be *puzzling* and they often include *problems*. But those same plans come with His *presence* and His *power* and they always have a *purpose.*

After Jesus stilled the storm, we read in verse 1 that ***“they came to the other side of the sea, to the country of the Garasenes.”*** Let’s just admit that this is a rather strange encounter where we see three realms meeting – Satan, Society and the Savior.

Let me also point out that the Bible declares demon possession is a real issue. This man is not just deranged or suffering from mental illness nor is this encounter just symbolic of evil in the world today. The Bible presents demon possession as sober reality and that’s how we should take it as well.

I like what C.S. Lewis wrote: *“There are two equal and opposite errors into which our race can fall about the devils. One is to disbelieve in their existence. The other is to believe, and to feel an excessive and unhealthy interest in them. They themselves are equally pleased by both errors and hail a materialist or a magician with the same delight.”*

I see a progression in this passage that can be summarized with three words that will serve as our outline:

* **Destruction**
* **Deliverance**
* **Deployment**

**1. Destruction.** Nate just described the destruction that he experienced through drugs and alcohol. Let’s look now at the destruction demons were causing, leaving a man in mega misery. Verse 2 says that, ***“When Jesus had stepped out of the boat, immediately there met him out of the tombs a man with an unclean spirit.”*** It was still dark when they landed on the shore of a cemetery and as soon as Jesus disembarked a wild man ran up to him. This had to be an eerie experience for the disciples as their nerves were already shot from the storm on the lake. Luke tells us that he didn’t have any clothes on and that he was ***“driven by the demon”*** (Luke 8:29).

Verses 3-5 says that no one could restrain or subdue this man. On top of that, he was self-destructive. He was uncontrollable outcast: ***“He lived among the tombs. No one could bind him anymore, not even with a chain, 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. Night and day among the tombs and on the mountains he was always crying out and cutting himself with stones.”*** He made his dwelling among the dead. The word for ***“crying”*** means that he was shrieking and screaming wildly. He was defiled, depraved and desperate! Satan loves to distort and destroy the image of God in people.

Satan had wrecked him and society couldn’t reform him. His problems couldn’t be solved by social programs nor could he be assisted by human intervention. Self-help programs didn’t help because he was self-destructive. Nothing could restrain him. His lifestyle was destroying him. And he never stopped crying and cutting himself.

In short, he was hopeless and helpless, isolated and empty, trapped and tormented…and he needed someone to deliver him.

**2. Deliverance.** Nate went through a long period of destructive behavior but then Jesus Christ began to deliver him. Let’s listen to the next part of his testimony.

**Nate Weaver Testimony – Part 2**

My mom flew in from the Quad Cities and took me back with her to admit me into Riverside inpatient treatment facility in Rock Island. We had a few different outside groups that would come in and talk to us about recovery but this one group stood out to me. They would sing contemporary Christian music and talk about the importance of Jesus Christ in the 12-step process. They emphasized sobriety and recovery but most importantly that a relationship with Christ is something to celebrate. I was intrigued. I said “Wait a minute, you are going to give us food, sing with us, and tell us about God and 12-step recovery? I need all of those. Sign me up!”

After my month long inpatient treatment at Riverside, I moved in with my Mom and her husband. I started attending Celebrate Recovery but I relapsed within 30 days.

It was breaking my mom’s heart as it does any parent to watch their child struggle like this. So in January of 2013, they had me admitted into Country Oaks. At first I was furious.

Once my anger settled down I thought long and hard about my options. I could be defiant, angry, and bitter which would accomplish nothing or I could swallow my pride and say I don’t like the situation but I am determined to get the most out of this. I found out from my counselor that Edgewood actually buses people out to Celebrate Recovery from Country Oaks.

From that point on I was at CR every Friday night. After a couple of months, the CR band announced that they were looking for a drummer. I clearly saw how God had placed me at the perfect place at the perfect time in my recovery. This new responsibility that God had blessed me with was huge to my recovery. I had been playing drums my whole life and I now realized that God had been preparing me for this opportunity to use this gift to worship Him.

I knew that I still needed a lot more help if I was going to make this last and that meant that I needed to really develop my relationship with Christ. I immediately signed up for the next 12-step study group. It is hard to put into words the beautiful feeling it was to have rekindled my long-lost relationship with Christ. I still had a lot of my life to clean up from years of wrecking it but I saw hope and felt a peace and comfort that I had always looked for in a bottle.

Though my relationship with Christ was growing I reached a point where I was faced with giving up some of my past. God wanted to make me into a new creation and I was not willing to completely trust Him by surrendering everything in my life. I had only 8 months of sobriety and my refusal to completely surrender started to make me feel discontent. I now know that this is the most dangerous feeling in my recovery and the surest sign that I am close to a relapse.

I found myself flat on my face quite literally. I spent another miserable winter in what was a very low depressing time to say the least. By January of 2014 I was back in the hospital detoxing and clinging to life once again.

I look back on that relapse and thank God for it. It taught me so many good lessons but I had to pray and ask Him to show them to me as He healed my mind, body and soul. It made me realize that I had to completely surrender my whole life to His will. If I hold on to even part of my sinful will it will turn from a small path into a highway for the enemy into my life. I thank God for the *storms* and the hardship because without them I never would have found peace.

By working through Celebrate Recovery, I was able to identify the root causes of most of my bad habits including alcoholism.

I asked God for freedom from this one compulsive behavior and He showed me that the key to dealing with what I thought was my one primary issue was to face *all* my sinful disobedience. I can’t just mask one and hope the others go away. It just doesn’t work like that.

This process is not easy and it is not quick but it is free because God’s Grace is free. I had to do more than turn the care of my will over to God; I had to accept the sacrifice that Jesus made as my sin substitute. He died so that I didn’t have to. How could I turn down a free gift like absolute forgiveness and eternal life? I had to be willing to be open and honest with myself and with God. By working through my past and not around it God helped me to heal.

Proverbs 3:5-6 says, “Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths.”

The great thing about my Savior is that He asks me to surrender everything and gives back to me what I need. But He gives it back better than it was before, and more than I had in the first place.

Let’s look and see how this messed up man found deliverance from his destruction beginning in verse 6. As this tombstone terrorist came running up to Jesus he hit the brakes and fell on his knees: ***“And when he saw Jesus from afar, he ran and fell down before Him.”*** This shows the power and authority of Jesus. He hadn’t even said a word and the miserable man was on his face as if in worship before Him. This man who ran from everyone else, ran to Jesus! This makes me think of Philippians 2:10: ***“That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow.”***

The demon in this man becomes greatly distressed because it knows exactly who Jesus is. Verse 7 tells us what he said, ***“And crying out with a loud*** [megas] ***voice, he said, ‘What have you to do with me, Jesus, the Son of the Most High God?’”*** The demon detects a dangerous opponent in Jesus and cries out with a booming voice.

It’s interesting that demons are not atheists and their doctrine is orthodox. They know exactly who Jesus is and call Him by His divine name – ***“Son of the Most High God.”*** The demon cries out in fear because it’s scared as James 2:19 says: ***“Even the demons believe—and shudder!”***

By the way, this is less a confession and more a ploy to try and usurp the authority of Jesus. Declaring one’s name was considered a way to secure mastery over someone. And then the demon dared to arrogantly misuse the name of God as he tried to get his way: ***“I adjure you by God, do not torment me.”***  Jesus recognized that this man was in anguish not just mentally and emotionally but also spiritually and therefore needed deliverance. Look at verse 8: ***“Come out of the man, you unclean spirit!”***

In verse 9 Jesus demands that the demon identify himself: ***“‘What is your name?’ He replied, ‘My name is Legion, for we are many.’”*** A legion (not the American Legion) was made up of 6,000 highly trained Roman soldiers, revealing that this man had an army of evil spirits inside him.

What happens next is a bit strange in verses 10-13: ***“And he begged him earnestly not to send them out of the country.  Now a great herd of pigs was feeding there on the hillside, and they begged him, saying, ‘Send us to the pigs; let us enter them.’ 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.”***

The demons don’t want to go to the abyss and so they beg Jesus for permission to go into the pigs. The tense here is that they repeatedly made this request. Whatever else you think about the destruction of all these pigs, notice that Jesus gave the demons permission. Don’t ever think that Satan is more powerful than God or that he’s on the same level with Him. Satan is a created being who can do nothing without God’s permission.

BTW, this “swan dive” is the first case of “deviled ham” and answers the common question about whether pigs can fly. They can’t. They can’t swim either. That’s a lot of bacon on the beach!

In verse 14, we see that the herdsmen have a cow about the pigs and so they ***“fled and told it in the city and in the country. And people came to see what it was that had happened.”***  We know from Matthew 8:33 that they wanted to come see what had happened to the man. The people are curious and so they now come and check it all out. Verse 15 describes their reaction: ***“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…”*** This had to blow their minds. No one had been able to help him and now he’s healed. He went from screaming and shrieking and breaking shackles to sitting peacefully. He is now clothed and calm.

You’d think people would be really excited but instead they become very unsettled. Look how verse 15 ends: ***“…and they were afraid.”*** It’s interesting, isn’t it? Why would they be afraid *after* he had been delivered? For the same reason the disciples wigged out after the wind and the waves were stilled. They knew they were in the presence of deity.

While they were afraid of this maniacal man when he lived a destructive life they had gotten used to it. Now they don’t know what to do when they see that he’s been delivered. His transformation was so dramatic that they freak out. You would think they would ask Jesus some questions or find out how he could deliver them from the sins that were suffocating them. But instead of being drawn to Jesus, they demand that Jesus depart.

By the way, some of you have experienced something similar since you’ve been saved. Your friends and loved ones don’t want you to talk about Jesus because they’re now uncomfortable around you.

We see this in verses 16-17: ***“And those who had seen it described to them what had happened to the demon-possessed man and to the pigs.  And they began to beg Jesus to depart from their region.”*** This is one of the saddest sentences in Scripture. Lots of people choose dysfunction over deliverance because they are afraid to change. Have you noticed that some seem eager to learn about Jesus and others want nothing to do with Him? I’m reminded that it’s difficult to stay neutral about Him. You either want the Deliverer to deliver you or you want Him to depart from you. I saw something on Pastor Dan’s Facebook wall this week that serves as a good reminder: *“We change when the pain of staying the same is greater than the pain of changing.”* Are you ready to change?

Jesus doesn’t force Himself on anyone. When He’s invited, He comes. When He’s received, He responds. When He’s told to go away, He leaves. Many people don’t have anything against Jesus; they just want to keep Him at arms length. One pastor sounds a warning: *“When Jesus knocks on the door of your heart, run quickly to let him in. Do not think that He is obliged to come back again and again. We want a gentle Jesus who keeps his nose out of our business and who will take us to heaven but not interfere in the way we live on earth. We want a Jesus who builds our self-esteem and makes us happy, but we want nothing to do with the Lord from heaven who calls us to take up our cross and follow Him.”*

**3. Deployment.** We see the progression from *destruction* to *deliverance* and finally to *deployment*. Nate, would you come back up and share how God has been revealing His purpose to you?

**Nate Weaver Testimony – Part 3**

I reached a point during this process where I realized that I wasn’t satisfied to just stop being a bad drunk. I wanted more. I wanted to start being the best Christian man that I could be.

I have lived in many different places in this world and I have experienced many “so called” pleasures of the flesh but at the end of the day I was always left feeling empty and alone. C.S. Lewis said, *“It’s not that God thinks we ask for too much; He thinks we settle for far too little.”*

Jesus wants to give me a real life… and I chose a party. Jesus wants to give me long-lasting contentment… and I chose a cheap, short lived high. Jesus wants to give me a loving wife and I chose one night stands and pornography. I’m tired of getting what I want. I’m now ready to get what Jesus wants me to have and I’m tired of selling myself short and settling for anything less.

Jeremiah 29:11 says, “For I know the plans I have for you,” declares the Lord, “plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.”

If I am honest with myself I have to admit that I should be dead several times over. So at some point I had to ask myself WHY ME? Today, I now know the answer, and it’s as true for me as it is for anyone. It’s because I have a purpose, and it’s not my purpose but it’s a purpose that has been given to me by the very same person who saved me, which also happens to be the same One who created me for that very purpose.

I live my life in constant pursuit of more understanding about how to fulfill this purpose.

I never dreamed that I would be playing Christian music in a church but now I realize that it’s one of many of God’s purposes for me. I now have the honor of co-leading small groups on Friday nights and a 12-step group on Sunday nights.

*God has taken me from destruction to deliverance and has now deployed me as a volunteer* at Riverside in-patient treatment center! Now I’m the one on the other side telling them about this awesome program called Celebrate Recovery that I first heard about sitting right where they are sitting now. It has all come full circle and God has turned this washed up wanna-be into an active member of the Body of Christ.

And the best part is, He and I are just getting started!

Let’s look now at how this delivered man was deployed. The crowd wanted Jesus to get away from them while the man wanted to get close to Him. Check out verse 18: ***“As he was getting into the boat, the man who had been possessed with demons begged Him that he might be with Him.”*** He who feared His arrival now dreaded His departure.

It’s interesting that Jesus honored the request of the people to leave them alone but denied the request of a disciple who wanted to spend time with Him. It’s because Jesus had a greater purpose for him. He was to be deployed as a man on mission to the very people he already knew. In verse 19 Jesus gives him his marching orders: ***“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 had mercy on you.’”*** He was to go to his neighbors and to the nations with his salvation story.

No one is ever saved to sit. Now that you know, you must go. Once you’re saved, you have a story to tell.

Sometimes we don’t speak up for the Savior because we’re afraid we’ll be asked questions we can’t answer. Listen. You don’t have to have all the answers. I love how the man born blind replied to a bunch of religious guys who were grilling him after he was healed in John 9:25: ***“One thing I do know, that though I was blind, now I see.”*** Psalm 66:16: ***“Come and hear, all you who fear God, and I will tell you what He has done for my soul.”*** Jesus tells us exactly what to say: ***“Tell them how much the Lord has done for you, and how He has had mercy on you.”***

This man went from *destruction* to *deliverance* and now he is fully *deployed* in verse 20: ***“And he went away and began to proclaim in the Decapolis how much Jesus had done for him, and everyone marveled.”*** When God saves us we must share it with others. That’s what the Samaritan woman did in John 4:29: ***“Come, see a man who told me all that I ever did. Can this be the Christ?”***  The word for ***“proclaim”*** is translated as *“publish.”* The Decapolis was a federation of 10 Greek cities. We read that ***“everyone marveled,”*** which means that they were struck with astonishment.

**Putting the Passage into Practice**

**1. Use this outline when you give your testimony.** One of the best ways to tell someone your salvation story is to follow the progression from this passage. Move from *destruction* to *deliverance* to *deployment*. Or to say it another way, start with talking about what your life was like *before* you met Christ. Then let them know *how* you got saved and end by celebrating how your life has been changed *after* you were saved. Start where you are and tell what you know. Go and tell.

**2. God can accomplish much through one person wholly devoted to Him.** D.L. Moody often said, *“The world has yet to see what God will do with and for and through and in the man who is fully consecrated to Him.”* Incidentally, because of this man’s faithful witness, legions of people came to faith in Jesus Christ. When Jesus returned to this area later a whole crowd came out to see Him and believed. The Decapolis became a center of Christianity for many years. And it came about through the impact of one person. Don’t forget that Jesus came to this side of the lake for one man and now that he’s on mission amazing things are happening. One man or woman on mission for Christ can accomplish much.

**3. Intentionally spend time with lost people this summer.** One soul is worth far more than any possession. I’m reminded of some advice I heard a pastor give when trying to shepherd multiple people with multiple problems – *“Do for one what you wish you could do for all.”* That person you walk by…those people you look down on…that person you secretly judge…that person who scares you…is a soul for whom Christ died. You have never met anyone who does not matter to God.

Here’s an action step. I the 12 weeks of summer, intentionally have a meal or coffee or dessert with six different people who don’t go to Edgewood…yet. On average that’s one get-together every two weeks. You could reserve Sunday nights for intentional neighboring since we don’t have Sunday evening services in the summer. You can do it. We can do it.

**4. Partner with ministries that are bringing freedom to people.** I’ve been very moved by all the ministries and places to get help in the QCA. Here are some that I wrote down. These first ones are our Go Team Partners, which means that every time you give of your financial resources during the offering or when you give online, you are helping these ministries go with the gospel.

* **Moody Radio** (Under Jason Crosby’s leadership, Moody Radio is bringing the Word to lives in this region)
* **Pregnancy Resources** (Baby Bottle Project – Mobile Van will be here July 5th!)
* **World Relief** (Walk for Freedom on June 18th)
* **Calvary International Revival Church** (made up of refugees from 7 different countries in Africa)

And this month we’ve added two new ministries to our missions Go Team:

* **Youth Hope** (a ministry that shares the hope of Jesus Christ by focusing on children and youth activities for low-income families through street outreach, youth centers and camping ministry. BTW, you have an insert in your bulletin with a list of needs these campers have)
* **Safe Families of the QCA** (volunteer movement motivated by compassion that gives hope and support to families in distress.)

I also think of the ministry we have by extension in two big areas. Both of these make *Anchor for the Soul* from **Keep Believing Ministries**, another one of our Go Team partners, available to people.

* **Jail Ministry** (Larry McLean shares the gospel with inmates at the Scott County Jail)
* **Salvation Army** (Gary Pickering reaches out to men at the Salvation Army every Sunday night)

In addition, Nate Weaver is ministering at **Riverside Inpatient Treatment Center.** And then I think of other ministries in the QCA like **Christian Care Rescue Mission** and the **180 Zone**. Their mission is to bring the love, hope and opportunity of Jesus Christ to those in crisis situations by preventing, reaching and developing in partnership with local churches. I attended their banquet a week ago with over 800 other people and was blown away with all God is doing through this ministry.

I also celebrate **Christian counselors** and those serving in the **mental health** and **medical fields**!

And I’m grateful for what **churches** and **fellow pastors** are doing in the QCA. I saw a pastor friend at the 180 Zone banquet and when we left he gave me a hug and said, *“I love pastoring the Quad Cities with you.”*

And of course, we celebrate the life change that happens in literally hundreds of people just like Nate through Pastor Dan’s leadership of **Celebrate Recovery!** In November we’ll celebrate the 15th anniversary of CR here at Edgewood.

**5. Don’t play around with sin.** Satan does his most sinister work in secret ways by ***“disguising himself as an angel of light”*** (2 Corinthians 11:14).Listen. Just because something looks good or feels good does not mean that it is good.

Satan is out to fleece you as he seeks to destroy you. John 10:10 says, ***“The thief comes only to steal, kill and destroy.”***  This man lost his family, his decency, his self-control, his friends, everything. Don’t let that happen to you. We don’t know what led to his bondage but somehow he opened himself up to the dark forces of evil. Proverbs 5:22: ***“The evil deeds of a wicked man ensnare him; the cords of his sin hold him fast.”***

Sin will always take you farther than you planned to go, keep you longer than you were planning to stay, and cost you more than you were planning to pay. Jesus said in John 8:34 that ***“everyone who sins is a slave to sin.”*** Sin is no small thing. The more we play around with it, the more in bondage we become.

**6. Today is your day for deliverance.** No one could help this man and he couldn’t help himself either. Jesus gave him freedom and He can break the chains that bind you as well. Nothing is too hard for Him and there is no sin beyond His power. Jeremiah 32:27: ***“Behold, I am the Lord, the God of all flesh: is anything too hard for me?”***

Like this man you and I live among the dead because we are dead in our trespasses and sins. We’re shackled by sin and Satan is sabotaging our lives. That’s why we need the Savior. If you ask Him, Jesus will enter the squalor of your sinful depravity and set you free. Jesus tamed the tombstone terrorist and He can tame you. *He turned a drunk into a drummer for Christ!*

Are you ready to admit that you’re a mess? Will you cry out for His mercy? In the midst of your *destructive* behaviors, ask Him to *deliver* you. And when He does, you’ll be *deployed* and thus fulfill your purpose in life.

**Closing Song:** “Amazing Grace: My Chains Are Gone”

8:00 – Jacob and Maggie Peiper Baby Dedication and Membership

10:45 – Cory and Kati Jo Baby Dedication

 Diane Swimline Membership (Tim)