

Personal Evangelism in Biblical Perspective: iShare—Our Testimony

Mark 5:1-20

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March 25, 2012 – Morning Sermon

We are in our series of iShare where each one of us who are called and committed to the Lord, share the Gospel with this world one by one by one. Let's look at Mark 5. This is the Word of God. It's 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.

We are returning back to our iShare series after a little break. The theme has been very specific. The Apostle Paul says in I Thessalonians 2:8 [8] *So, being affectionately desirous of you, we were ready to share with you not only the gospel of God but also our own selves, because you had become very dear to us.* It is the call of each and every believer to share the Gospel and by giving themselves for the sharing of the Gospel to others. So we have been looking at iShare why, iShare how, iShare who and today we’re looking at iShare through your testimony. A testimony may not share the Gospel directly but it can be an effective instrument to share the Gospel.

Before I get to that I’d like to look back briefly at three anchor axioms that are guiding us through this series. Why do we need to be sharing the Gospel with others? The first thing we need to realize is why Jesus came into this world. The first anchor axiom we have established is the incarnation ministry of Jesus. Why did He come into this world? We don’t have to guess about this because Jesus tells you four different times that He has come to seek and to save the lost. I have come intentionally to do the will of My Father. What is the will of the Father? It is to seek and to save the lost and He will lose not one of them.

The second anchor axiom is the indisputable ministry of Christians and churches. What is the indisputable ministry of every Christian and every church? It is very simple. Jesus says in John 20:21b, [21] *As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you.* So if Jesus came into the world to do the will of the Father, then what is every Christian and every church to be doing? They are to be doing the will of the Father and Jesus Christ which is to seek and to save the lost.

That brings us to the third anchor axiom which is the incredible opportunity for each Christian and church which is to develop a strategy for evangelism. That is seeking and bringing the message of salvation to the lost. You have this incredible opportunity. So if I come up to and say “What is your strategy to fulfill Jesus’ command to go and to seek and save the lost?” You would hopefully agree with me that, that is your command. Preach the Gospel to all the nations. Go make disciples. Jesus has given this command in multiple ways and He has said “As the Father has sent Me, so send I you.” So what is your strategy? You might say that you just do it serendipity but Jesus didn’t do it serendipity. He would say “I need to go to that town. We have to go here. I need to go to that well. I need to go to that tree and bring that man down out of that tree.” Jesus was very intentional. Certainly we should always be ready for the serendipity

moment that God brings to us but we are always ready to plan our way even as we trust God to direct our steps.

So what would be your strategy? What would be Briarwood's strategy for evangelism? We have Bridge to Life training, a mission's conference and all those strategies in place, why? It is because we're supposed to be intentional, but what is your personal strategy for evangelism? Let's look at this vignette of Jesus doing some personal evangelism through a short term mission's trip that He took.

He got into a boat on the western side of the Sea of Galilee and He went over to the eastern side of the Sea of Galilee. The event I just read from Mark 5 is what happened next. It is described for us in some detail. It gives us a lot of insights that are very powerful about personal evangelism and maybe some things that will help us in terms of our strategy for personal evangelism. How will I share with others? Many of you are doing it so well because I am getting emails constantly about your iShare moments.

One of the ladies in our church is taking this thing on and I think she's a better Presbyterian preacher than I am because she has three points to her strategy. She says "I share because I dare because I care." I wished I had thought of that. That would have been a great three point outline. Those are great insights and I've been getting all kinds of reports from people about their iShare moments that God has been given to you but this is an iShare moment that Jesus gives us.

I want to give you four transforming truths about personal evangelism to look for in the life of Jesus. The first one is there is no place that Jesus will not go to seek and to save the lost. Why would I put it this way? This passage is written by John Mark under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit writing what Peter has dictated under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit and notice that John Mark won't even call the place by its name. He says that they went to the other side of the sea. Here is a translation for you. We went to that place that my mother told me not to go to. Growing up you can recall those times when your mom said "Good little girls and boys don't go over there – the other side of the tracks." In other words, if Jesus had told them where He was going when He got them in the boat they would have argued with Him. John Mark wouldn't even use the name of it.

The other side of the sea was called the Galilee of the Gentiles. That was the place that had bowed to the Assyrians, the Babylonians and most recently had bowed to the Greeks and become totally paganized. It is what they used to call Hellenized. They now engaged in pagan worship. The name of the area is Decapolis. In Greek deca- means ten and -pola means cities. There are no Hebrew names. They had totally apostatized from the faith. So on this side of the sea there were no synagogues to go to, no reading of the Scriptures, no calling to repentance and no exaltation of Yahweh. If it is it has been mixed in with

everything else, even immoral sexual rites – paganism. We hear they even have demon possessed people living in cemeteries. You don't want to go over there.

Here is your first lesson. Jesus doesn't cross any place off. There is no place that Jesus will not go to seek and to save the lost. So for every church, the strategy should be there is no place we won't go. That doesn't mean He leads us to every place but there is no place we won't go. What about your personal strategy? There is no place we will not go to seek and to save the lost. We will go to that Save-A-Life, the prison, it doesn't matter where. We'll go across the street or anywhere in Birmingham. We will not only send people anywhere, but we'll go anywhere.

The second transforming truth is there is no power that Jesus cannot overcome to seek and to save the lost. John Mark has done something very carefully here. If you had lived in those days, the rabbis would have recognized not only the reality of Satan but also of demon possession. The rabbis had taught that if there was demonic presence there will be five marks associated with it. What are these five marks John Mark would have learned as a boy going to the synagogue? Number one would have been uncleanness. Number two would have been sexual perversity. Number three would have been bizarre behavior. Number four would have been supernatural strength. Number five would have been necromancy – communion and fascination with the dead. That is exactly what John Mark carefully weaves into the narrative.

Here is a man who comes up unclean, unwashed, filthy, no hygiene. He comes up naked – sexual perversity. It says that no one can subdue him – supernatural strength. He cries out and gashes himself with stones yelling all the time – acting in bizarre fashion. He lives among the dead, in a cemetery – communion with the dead. All five of those marks were there. John Mark makes sure that you understand that when Jesus got out of the boat that He just marched up to the gate of Hell, but there is no power that He cannot overcome. That's why the Bible says to you not to flee Satan but to resist him and he will flee from you.

I'm not talking about what some churches teach of this ritual of holy relics, throwing this and dusting that. I'm also not talking about the churches that stomp around and get arrogant saying louder each time "I command you..., I command you..., I command you..." I'm saying very simply this. If you want to see demons all you have to do is lift up Jesus and preach the Gospel and they have to flee. There is no power that He cannot overcome. We don't have to do rituals. All we have to do is very carefully lift up Jesus Christ. Shine the light and darkness has to go. He has defeated Satan at the cross. He held the kingdom of darkness up for ridicule at the cross. He has bound the strong man, now go plunder his house. There is no power that He cannot overcome and greater is He that is in you than he that is in the world. There is no power that He cannot overcome to seek and to save the lost.

Think of what this demon possessed man must have looked like. Don't think too carefully of what he might have looked like but he comes in naked with chains, yelling, screaming and what would you do if he came into this room right now? I would get right behind Bruce Stallings. Bruce, praise the Lord for executive pastors, Amen. If those disciples knew where they were going they wouldn't have gotten in the boat. If they knew they were going to meet they wouldn't have gotten out of the boat. Then as Jesus is declaring He is sovereign, Satan is God's Satan because he can't do anything that God doesn't allow him to do for His own purposes.

As this demonic legion realizes that they are about to be cast out they cry out to Jesus saying "Don't send us away. Have You come to torment us? Has the time come to be cast into hell, itself? Don't send us away, send us to the pigs." If you want to know that this is an apostate place what would good Jewish people be doing raising pigs? This legion wants to be sent into the pigs. When we see that Jesus has permitted them to go into the pigs we may look at that as Jesus being a nice southern gentleman but that's not really what's happening here. When they go into the pigs which are unclean and they go over the cliff what would have been in the Hebrew mind would have been the demons to the pigs over the cliff into the sea which stood for the door of the abyss in the Hebrew cosmology – the way a Hebrew would look at life. I take people to that very cliff when I go on my trips to Israel. The river is good and it brings life. The sea is bad and it roars and foams. The sea was the door to the abyss.

Again, John Mark is telling you that He is Lord of all as He sends them into the abyss, over the cliff in the unclean pigs. There is no power He cannot overcome to seek and to save the lost. So there is no place we won't go and there is nothing that God's people will run from or be intimidated by, for the Lord is with you and He is your strength. So take the Gospel anywhere and don't be fearful of any moment.

The third transforming truth is there is no person so lost that Jesus cannot seek and save them. If I had gone over there on a short term mission's trip and went through some personal iShare moments I'm not sure I would have picked this guy. I would have said "Is there somebody a little closer to the Kingdom?" But Jesus went right up to this man because there is no place He won't go, no power He won't overcome and there's no person so lost that He cannot save. There is no one that He cannot save, change, deliver from the penalty of sin and change them from glory to glory.

He takes cowards and saves them, like Elijah. He takes criminals guilty of manslaughter and He saves them, like Moses. He takes adulterers who conspire to murder to cover up their crime and sin and saves them, like David. He saves sinners. He saves zealots, political radicals, and government thieving bureaucrats, like Matthew. He saves traitors, like Peter who denied Him. He saves religious terrorists, like Saul of Tarsus. He saves you. He saves me. There

is no person so lost that He cannot save so we don't cross any place or people off. There is no person so lost that He cannot save them.

The fourth transforming truth is there is no person that He has saved that He will not use to seek and to save others. Now the text moves on and this man has changed. This man is saved and then changed. He has been saved by grace and forgiven with the righteousness of Christ now his. Then he is changed. Note the order. He is delivered from the bad record and the bad heart and then God begins to change his heart. It's not go change and come to Jesus. It's just come to Jesus. Nothing in my hands I bring, simply to the cross I cling. So he comes to Christ and Christ delivers him from the dominion of sin. He has delivered him from the dominion of sin and set him free from the penalty of sin. I love that hymn that says 'Be of sin, the double cure, cleanse me from its guilt, forgiven, now innocent in the righteousness of Christ and cleanse me from its power.' He has been set free from both the guilt and the power. Now He delivers him from the very practice of sin. Now he is clothed and in his right mind. Now God is changing him, growing him and delivering him from the practice of sin as the evidence of him having been converted by the grace of God in his life.

So what happens? The people hear about it and they come out. They say "Look at what happened to him!" Can I tell you what happened to all our pigs? Everyone said "Isn't it wonderful, Jesus is coming for He cleans up demons and our economy." No, they don't say that. They get pretty ticked off. They say "I don't care about this demon guy but look at all the pigs that just went over the cliff!" There are sins that are not only besetting in our lives but there are sins that entangle cultures. What entangles them?

You can debate after debate after debate but what happens in a culture is in the sanctity of life issue, the Biblical sexuality issue, pornography but what's really at stake is the entrenched industries of sin and all that people make from them. So they want Jesus to leave. They don't want anything to do with Him. They say "Would You just get out of here?"

Now put yourself in the shoes of the demon possessed man who is now saved and God is changing him. I don't think back home that all the kids just run up to this man. He doesn't have the greatest reputation in the world, does he? The people are upset at what has happened to him and because of what Jesus had done so the man turns to Jesus and says "Can I join Your church? Can I get in Your boat? I'd like to go with You." I have a series of sermons I'm working on where Jesus answers prayer, "No." Here is one of these times. The man says "Can I go with You?" Jesus says "No. Go home. Go tell what great things the Lord has done for you."

The demoniac who was delivered, saved and changed joins the woman at the well who went and gave her testimony. He joins Zacchaeus who went and gave his testimony and brought people to a table to meet with Jesus. He joins Matthew

who was saved and gave his testimony and brought people to meet with Jesus. Go tell what great things the Lord has done for you. Go tell your story. Go give your testimony. Go home to your friends, family and don't stop there and tell them what great things the Lord has done for you because there is no person that He has saved that He will not use to seek and to save others. My dear friends, that is you and me. If God has saved us He'll use us to seek and to save the lost. He will use you in your own unique way.

So here is your takeaway. A Spirit filled, Christ centered and Gospel driven Christian and/or church should have a strategy for personal evangelism to seek and to save the lost. We are to be Spirit filled which is surrendered to the Holy Spirit. We are to be Christ centered which is the evidence of being Spirit filled. We are to be Gospel driven where the Gospel is the foundation, formation and the motivation of our life. We have a strategy as a church. We have Bridge to Life training, Evangelism Explosion (EE), we have a missions program where we send out people to take the Gospel and plant Gospel churches all around the world, but let's not look at the church right now.

I want to look at you and me. What is my personal strategy? Do I have a personal strategy for evangelism? I'm going to get equipped. I want to give you a couple of thoughts about a strategy before we go to the testimony piece. First of all, you are all unique. Every one of you needs to create your personal strategy because you are unique by how God made you, saved you, gifted you and gave you unique abilities. No one else has exactly what you have. Some of you are unbelievably gifted with your hands, some are unbelievably insightful, some have been given an unbelievable personality that is absolutely inviting to other people and some have great gifts that God has given to you. Some have a home that's inviting. The way you talk and speak.

I had an uncle who loved to share the Gospel and he would just go down the street and stop people. It would basically come down to him saying "Are you saved? Let me tell you about Jesus." If I did what he did I would end up in a fist fight before I got to the first block. I would have to determine whether or not to hit back now that I'm trying to evangelize. Uncle Edgar could do that with absolutely amazing results. He ended up putting together a rescue mission right down town just out of that street evangelism that he did. He had an unbelievable gift and ability to do that. You have gifts and abilities. You have unique abilities, insights and opportunities.

I have unique opportunities because of you. For instance, I get the opportunity to have a visitor's dinner at my home for people who come to this church. Many people who come to this church are already Christians and praise the Lord for we get to have hospitality. Some people are seeking and in fact you actually sought them. Part of your personal evangelism strategy was to bring them to church so that they could hear the Gospel from somebody else and then they get an opportunity to come to our home. Then I get a chance to give my personal

testimony right there month after month after month. Then I get a chance to follow up when someone wants to know more about becoming a Christian. That's my unique opportunity. I get other opportunities when almost every week I get a phone call where someone says "Pastor, I've been talking to someone and could you come up and meet with us?" I'll say "Sure."

So I get unique opportunities and by the way, you can use your hobbies and interests. My hobbies are talking about the Civil War and playing golf. Both of them are very helpful. When I take people to the battlefields I sneak up and ambush them with the Gospel or I get invited to talk at a college and I get a chance to speak about history. Then I say "Can I tell you what is really going on in the lives of individuals?" We get the chances then to talk about that. Then there is golf for me which is so easy for me to evangelize because you just wait until someone misses a putt and you know right where they are spiritually. On a three foot putt miss you'll know right where they are headed for eternity. You don't need EE questions then.

So all of those things that are interests to you are there for you to use as opportunities, like gardening, computers, and tennis and enjoy them because they're great but don't idolize them. One of the ways not to idolize them is to constantly use them as a bridge to get the Lord into people's lives and to get people across that bridge to Jesus. So you have unique insights, gifts, abilities and you have unique relationships. You have relationships in school, teams and neighborhoods. You have all kinds of fishing pools in your life. Go fish for men! Start with your family. Go tell your home and your friends. Don't stop there but start there.

How can I walk by the people I meet everyday knowing they're headed for eternity and not knowing with conversation where they are going? If they are going to the eternal judgment of God in a place called hell I can tell them about the One who is the Way, the Truth and the Life who has loved them and sought them, who went to a cross and died for their sins so that they could have everlasting life. I can tell them the old, old story but I want to leave you with one final thought.

You can tell the old, old story by telling them how the old, old story became your story. Give your testimony. Jesus says to go and tell. Go tell your family and friends what great things the Lord has done for you. Notice He didn't say to go tell your friends how you cleaned up your life. You didn't clean up your life. Jesus came and took your life. Now you are clothed and in your right mind. That is the evidence that He has saved you. That's not what saved you. Tell them what great things the Lord has done for you and how He has had mercy upon you. Grace and mercy is the story of our life. So go tell them of that. A testimony may not be evangelistic unless you tell the old, old story as your story of Jesus' love to save sinners.

So go tell how, go tell what the Lord has done. Go tell them why He did it. Go tell what great things the Lord has done. Go tell them how He did it. Go tell them why for it wasn't because He needed you but it was because He loved you, even though you don't love Him, He loves you. He went to the cross for you. While we were still enemies Christ died for us. The ungodly is who He died for. Go tell them how, what He does and why He does it. Tell it well.

I think your testimony can be evangelistic and I think you should have the 3 minute testimony, the 10 minute testimony and the 20 minutes testimony. The 3 minute one is your elevator testimony. I want to at least plant the seed of the Gospel in three floors. So I need to be able to tell my story in 3 minutes. Work on it. Then there is your 10 minute testimony. I call this the sidewalk testimony. Work on that one. We're walking down the sidewalk and I want to tell about Jesus before we get to the next building. Then there is your 20 minute testimony. I call this your lunch talk. You're having lunch with someone so you pull out your napkin and talk with them about the Gospel. Tell them how The Story became your story and how it can become their story as they would come to Christ and surrender to Him who died for them. Here was the bad news now here is the Good News. Here is Life!

Not only tell it but show it. It's great! Not only did Jesus take that man right where he was but He didn't leave him there. God's grace took him where he was but then God's grace then took him where he ought to be, as God's saving grace becomes transforming grace. So Jesus answers the man "no, go home and give your testimony and make sure it's evangelistic. Tell them what great things the Lord has done for you." Tell who has done it, what He had done, why He did it, and tell it well. He must have because they marveled. Not only tell it well but tell it and show it. By the way, your showing it is not evangelism. Showing what we live opens the door and then tell it. Go tell it. Do you remember the old show and tell? Show and tell. Show what the Lord has done and when the Lord opens the door, tell what the Lord has done and it was the Lord that did it.

I want to finish with this thought. What's really interesting is that when you get to this Jesus sends this man back to the Gentile of the Galilees. He will send twelve of the disciples to seek and to save the lost in Jerusalem and Judea. Then He'll send seventy to Samaria. So Jesus is going to cut loose 82 iSharers over here and He leaves one back here. Two chapters later Jesus comes back and the same people that had asked Him to leave, throngs come after Him. Crowds surround Him. He comes back again in Mark 8 and He is surrounded by crowds, even hundreds of them follow Him over to a mountain side and they don't have anything to eat from this place, just to listen to Him. Praise the Lord for that man gave his testimony. In the same place where they wanted Jesus to leave, now begins to follow Him and throng around Him.

If you lead someone to Christ and both of you lead someone to Christ and God in His sovereign grace uses you and the four of you lead someone to Christ next

year and this continues year after year then in 38 years we have eight billion who have been led to Christ, the world's population. I tried to illustrate this a couple of Sundays ago by bringing my wife up here who shared with me. Now we have been able to share with others all of our life. If that began to happen where everyone was evangelizing everybody everywhere then in 38 years all would know Christ. I tried to give a visual here.

I got permission from my elders to do this illustration here at church this morning. I want to try and make this as visual as I can. Basically every section of this church has sinners. In this illustration Briarwood is going to plant two churches. I'm going to ask John Spencer to plant this church over here and Lynn Downing to plant this church over here. Now Lynn Downing, before he went out when through iShare at Briarwood. John Spencer did not come to church those Sunday mornings and even though he's going to be a church planter he hasn't heard about everyone evangelizing everybody everywhere. So John is going to add to his church one by one but not Lynn. Lynn found out that he could bring someone to Christ, bring them to his church and then train them to share their faith so they tell someone else. One element of your personal strategy is your testimony but it's not the only element. When Lynn or John goes out into the audience and they touch you then you have just gotten saved. I wish it could be done that way. When John does that you come up to his church and stay but this won't happen with Lynn. When Lynn touches you and you come up then you'll receive the Bridge to Life training and then you'll also go and touch someone (share your testimony). You at Briarwood start praying for these churches. Now watch what happens.

Do you get the picture? John's church is small. Lynn's church is big. Does John Spencer, this pastor, love Jesus? Yes. Does he work hard as a pastor? Yes but what is missing is everyone embracing what Jesus saved us to send us to do. Jesus has sent us to share the Gospel with others. There are people all over this community that are waiting for you. We will provide as many instruments as we can from special services, evangelism training, special events, recreation events etc. We'll provide everything but it's you telling the old, old story as your story and planting and watering the Gospel for others. Amen!

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