

"Deliver Me From Evil"

Psalm 62:1-12 and Mark 1:14-20

www.biblegateway.com/bible?passage=psalm+62:1-12

www.biblegateway.com/bible?passage=mark+1:14-20

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Desperate people need hope!

John the baptizer was arrested and soon will be dead. The forces of evil succeed in doing away with another of God's prophets. God-fearing people hearing this news are desperate. The hope of release from the bondage of Rome and the establishment of God's kingdom on earth which John the Baptizer brought them dies in the hearts of all who hear that King Herod has imprisoned John. God's prophet John is as good as dead.

In the midst of the rage and grief at this terrible news, Jesus comes into the region around the Sea of Galilee. People are desperate. The attitude is despair. Their favorite color is black. And, Jesus speaks a message of hope. Jesus says, "*The time is fulfilled and the Kingdom of God has come near, repent and believe the good news.*" (Mark 1:15) (www.biblegateway.com/bible?passage=mark+1:15) First the brothers Simon and Andrew are invited to follow Jesus. Next, the fiery Zebedee brothers, James and John, are invited. Leave your work, Jesus says. I have work for you in God's Beloved Community.

You know the story. These men accept Jesus' invitation. They follow Jesus. The rest is history, as the commentators say. Can we find more in the story? Can we peel back the layers and find something that touches us? Let's look! The main action takes place on stage under the glare of the public lights. What can be going on behind the scenes of this cosmic drama?

Behind the scenes evil is being defeated!

From the beginning of Jesus' life there is a struggle between the power of God's goodness and the forces of evil that are a part of this world. The census could have been taken anytime. Why did a young first time pregnant girl have to travel for several months on donkey back to appear in Bethlehem. Could the evil forces be hoping for a miscarriage along the way? What about the murder of the children of Bethlehem? Consider the dangerous flight into and out of Egypt. What about the struggle that the adult Jesus had with Satan in the wilderness after Jesus' baptism. Behind the scenes there is obviously a struggle happening. The cross is the ultimate symbol of the power of evil seeking to destroy God's goodness. The bad news is seeking to overcome and eliminate the good news. Later in the life of the early church the Apostle Paul wrote about this struggle saying, *We are not fighting against humans. We are fighting against forces and authorities and against rulers of darkness and powers in the spiritual world.* (Ephesians 6:12)

www.biblegateway.com/bible?passage=ephesians+6:12

Backstage there is more happening than we know about. There is a struggle going on between good and evil which effects us all. The scientifically minded persons caught up in the reductionist method will do their best to explain away both evil and good as little more than indigestion. Many of the world's religions acknowledge the reality of evil. Unfortunately all they have to offer as hope is a fatalistic view of life that rolls over and passively accepts whatever happens. In Islamic circles they say, En Shala, or As God Wills. In Buddhist or Hindu circles the words carrying the same meaning are, "It's karma."

The Western Enlightened Christian world recently woke up to the fact that the power of evil exists. One of the good things about the Enlightenment was that it did away with superstition. We don't burn witches anymore. We don't see evil spirits around every corner and within every flowing stream. In doing away with the superstition however, we also did away with a full understanding of the power of evil. Now that we are coming out from under the 300 year influence of the Enlightenment we need to get back to the basics!

What is evil?

M. Scott Peck, author of The Road Less Traveled and People of the Lie, asked his eight year old son what he thought evil was. His son David thought a bit and then gave a rather clever answer. He said, "Evil is live spelled backwards." A better definition is hard to find. Evil is that part of our behind the scenes world that seeks to reverse life and cause death. Evil is that force or power that will rob you of life. Words that describe evil and the acts of evil are death, disease, destruction, denial, deceit.

David Powlison in his book Reclaiming Spiritual Warfare, describes two kinds of evil. Powlison describes the distinction between situational evil and moral evil.

Situational Evils' key words are: disease, destruction, and death.

Situational evil is the horror that comes from living in this fallen world. Death, disease, and much of the natural disasters that create innocent suffering can be traced to situational evil. There are situations where evil things happen to innocent people and the only answer is that evil is present in our world. There is suffering of innocent people in this world. We do not live in the Garden of Eden. Evil and death were unleashed upon this world several millennium ago and they have had centuries to multiply their horror. Living in the Twenty First Century and looking back on the Twentieth Century gives us some idea of the horror that evil can inflict upon us.

Elie Wiesel, author of 21 books, Andrew Mellon Professor of Humanities at Boston University, and a survivor of Buchenwald writes in his book, Night, the results of his encounter with evil at age 15. His situation was that he and his family were arrested by Nazi soldiers and were deported to Auschwitz and then to Buchenwald. On his way into the camp he said good bye to his mother and sisters. They were killed in their first day at camp. He and his father were chosen by Dr. Mengele to be workers in the camp. His description of his feelings on that first night summarize the experience of all innocence's who are touched by evil. He writes: *Never shall I forget that night, the first night in camp which has turned my life into one long night, seven times cursed and seven times sealed. Never shall I forget that smoke. Never shall I forget the little faces of the children whose bodies I saw turned into wreaths of smoke beneath a silent blue sky. Never shall I forget those flames which consumed my faith forever. Never shall I forget that nocturnal silence which deprived me, for all eternity, of the desire to live. Never shall I forget those moments which murdered my God and my soul and turned my dreams to dust. Never shall I forget these things, even if I am condemned to live as long as God Himself. Never.* (Elie Wiesel, Night, P.32)

Situational evil comes upon us in our innocence and maims, mutilates, or murders us. Often people blame God, but the real blame needs to be focused upon evil. God's key words of victory over situational evil are Healing, Restoration, and Eternal life!

Moral Evils' key words are: deceit, denial, despair, and depression.

We all know about moral evil. We know the choices that we make which invite the powers of darkness into our lives. The unseen forces behind the stage have power only when we choose to give them power. For example, our decision to lie creates an opportunity for evil to have power within us. That decision then extends itself and evils' power grows as we lie to cover the first one. Ultimately, we cannot determine the lie from the truth and we are corrupted along with all who know us. The small lie, if continued gives greater power to evil than we can ever know. So much of the misery and pain of our lives is due to the unseen, but powerful forces of evil that are within us by our own small choices grown big.

Moral evil grows as the community of humanity chooses to violate the principles and values that God gives us to guide us to full and free life. Think for a moment of the power caused by humanities choice to give power to the evil forces of this world.

- Think of war that kills and maims human beings every day of every year in this century.
- Consider family violence of such horrible proportions that social workers describe conditions that equal the horrors of the concentration camps.
- Think of sexual violence that wounds both men and women for life.

- What about the greed masked by the materialist success ethic that warps our communities.
- Consider gossip that can tear apart a church or neighborhood.
- I could continue to speak of the disastrous effects of undisciplined television, the horrors of drug and alcohol addiction, the spread of deadly venereal diseases.

All of these horrors are brought about by our choosing to give evil a foothold in our lives. The foothold grows behind the stage until we are robbed of our lives. This talk of evil sounds so depressing. Is there any good news? God's key words of victory over moral evil are: truthfulness, honesty, joy, and love!

God's Good News is that Jesus overcomes all evil!

The Prophet John is arrested and will surely die. Once more evil seems to have won. Looking into the face of death, despair, and deceit, the people are tempted to follow several time worn paths. They can capitulate and join the parade with the evil forces. They throw up our hands and proclaim, "its just our karma." Or, they can see the possibility, the opportunity to follow a new path. They can hear a new voice. They can experience a new hope.

Jesus comes into the lives of every person who honestly chooses to be delivered from evil. Jesus came to us as to Simon, Andrew, James, and John inviting them to follow Him. Jesus told them that God's new world is right here with them. God's Kingdom is at hand. There is good news of a greater power than evil that is available to us here and now. God's deliverance is ours. Jesus urges you to choose to build your life upon the rock of God's presence in your life. Jesus urges you to choose to live in Kingdom time. Jesus urges you to follow Him, living His values and following His commandments.

Safe upon God's Solid Rock!

The Psalmist writes words of eternal truth, *On God rests my deliverance and my honor; my mighty rock, my refuge is in God.*(62:7) (www.biblegateway.com/bible?passage=psalm+62:7) Our deliverance from evil comes in and through the power of God. The worst that evil can do is rob us of our life here, but in Christ Jesus I am blessed to live for eternity in God's Kingdom. In Christ Jesus, evils' power is defeated. I do not need to live with fear. My ultimate and final deliverance is God's gift of resurrection a gift God extends to every one of God's children. The Apostle John wrote of God's deliverance when he penned those famous words:

For God so loved the world that God gave God's only Son, so that everyone who believes in Christ may not perish but may have eternal life. Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through Him.(John 3:16-17)
(www.biblegateway.com/bible?passage=john+3:16-17)

When Jesus issues the invitation to follow Him, he wants us to give us the gift of life abundant now and for all eternity. There is a rock upon which you can build your lives. There is a foundation for life in which you can place your trust. God wants you to live! Jesus' good news is that the Rock of Ages is your rock now. With your life rooted and grounded upon God's Rock, you have the full power of God available to you to defeat anything evil can throw at you. Decide today that from this moment on you will stand upon God's Eternal Rock. Ask God for guidance to help you firmly and completely to choose to accept Jesus Christ as your personal deliverer and savior. Christ is The Rock of God for you! Stand upon the Rock of Ages and live!

Christ's Time is Kingdom time!

Kingdom time is time in its fullness. Forget linear time. So often we become slaves to *chronos* time. We have so many appointments, so much to do, that we miss the time that we have right now. We either live in the future filled with the anxiety of how we will accomplish all that needs to be done. Or, we live in the past with regrets and guilt over what we missed. *Chronos* time or linear can enslave us so that we lose our chance to live now. Jesus comes inviting us to live within Kingdom time or *karios* time. *Karios* time is the fullness of time right now. In *karios* time the past, the present, and the future are wrapped into one package. People experience *karios* time when they exclaim, "Time passed so quickly! I didn't know I was here so long!" The Apostle Paul repeats Jesus words when he writes to the church in Corinth, *the present form of this world*

is passing away. (**1 Corinthians 7:29**) (www.biblegateway.com/bible?passage=1+corinthians+7:29) To follow Jesus is to walk in the fullness of time, right now, today, in the present. Parents, Jesus can give you the gift of enjoying your children now. Husbands and wives, Jesus can give you the gift of being fully present with each other. You can be delivered from the power of evil that keeps you so busy with trivia that you miss the important relationships in your lives. To follow Jesus is to be empowered to fully live today! Whether we want to believe it or not, God gives to us enough time to do the work that God wants us to do. Kingdom time or *Kairos* time is living within the blessings of eternity now!

Living Christ's values gives us victory over evil!

Jesus says, *the Kingdom of God is near*. You can live within God's Kingdom. The simple choice is to live following Jesus. When we are in step with Jesus Christ, then moral evil has no chance in our lives. We continue to live in a fallen world, so that situational evil can attack us. Even with that horror confronting us, with Christ we will be victorious. Our suffering now is already redeemed in heaven by God. Jesus' invitation is to follow Him and live the full abundant life now and for eternity. When we walk day by day with Jesus Christ, we are empowered to live as we make even the smallest choices with Christ. Our test for being sure we are in step with Christ is to periodically check the values that guide our lives.

- In John's gospel, Christ commands us to **love one another**. Christ's value is to see every human being as a member of God's family. Are you willing to let go of legalistic judgments and seek through Christ's power to love every person you meet?
- Kingdom living is **truthful living**. Are you letting go of the habit of lying? The Kingdom value of truth invites us to live within a radical honesty with ourselves and with each other. To live in the truth of God requires community. I cannot live truthfully on my own. I need you to give me feedback, so that I do not fool myself. Christ models for us the power of forgiveness in the midst of truth. As we are purified from the habit of lying to ourselves and to others, we are freed from the power of evil in our lives.
- Are you growing in your ability to **accept responsibility**. Are you daily asking Christ to help you grow out of the habit of blaming or denying? What if God really did mean it when in Genesis God said that we were responsible for the care of the garden of earth? Can you grow beyond being a victim or persecutor to being a fully responsible member of God's Beloved Community? In step with Christ Jesus, you can have the power to live responsible and free of the evil nagging of guilt and shame.

Actually, Kingdom living is the simplest life of all. God's values for us are community values that build up freedom, establish peace, and create great joy. Jesus invites you to live with a growing taste of heaven right now. Will you follow Him? I hope and pray your answer is yes!